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Salvos

BOOKS BY WALDO FRANK

The Unwelcome Man (1917) ↗

The Dark Mother (1920)

Rahab (1922)

City Block (1922)

Holiday (1923)

To Life (*in preparation* 1924)

The Art of The Vieux Colombier (1918)

Our America (1919)

Salvos (1924)

Translation of Lucienne by Jules Romains (1924)

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S A L V O S

An informal book
about books and plays

WALDO FRANK

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1: *For a Declaration of War*

a.

THESE papers are informal records during seven years of my responses to the American literary scene. Most of them appeared in magazines: *The Seven Arts*, *The New Republic*, *Secession*, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, *Der Neue Merkur* and others. One of them, the essay on "The Art of the Vieux Colombier," was published by the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in a limited edition and is out of print. I have included it here because of the demand for it since its exhaustion and because it is not outside the immediate mood in which all of these papers were conceived and printed. I did not intend, as I wrote them, later to preserve them in a volume. And if I do so now, my impulse is to make more accessible, not to amend, their informal and contemporary note. For this reason, I have not altered them. Written *in medias res*, they are a personal palpation of a pregnancy in American letters. In their original form, they may convey some sense of the excitement of those years. To make them over, to bring them up to date, to relieve them of the errors which perspective has revealed would be to rob them of the chief value which I claim they have.

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It is nonetheless true that here and there as I reread, I find myself in dissent from these papers. I have avoided the dilemma of spoiling a record or of appearing falsely close to it in my present judgment, by the addition of a few postscripts as casual and reflective of my opinion of today as the articles themselves of the days in which I wrote them.

b.

Those years, as I see them now, were years of initial manœuvring for war. Pitched battles and campaigns I may then have judged what were only guerilla sallies, skirmishes, movements of reconnaissance. The spiritual forces of America were in too great chaos for definitive and intelligent encounter. This is true today. But in 1916 when the first of these papers was written the confusion was enormous. Men did not know their enemies or their friends: they did not know themselves.

The chief business of the American literary artist and critic of those days was therefore the launching of a call of rally. Primitive, lyrical, adolescent was our spiritual impulse; and were our spiritual leaders. The men in whose lives or works revolt from the material fixities was best incarnate, appeal to a creative life most eloquent and implicit, were the paramount figures. This explains the emergence of the Chicago Group in whom the note of protest and the pæan call to "life" were simplified and lovely. It was a time for individual forage, im-

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petuous escapade, for the sweet rhetoric of the emotions. There was no line of battle, no organized roll or standard: there were no Generals equipped with intelligence and strategic science to fortify their good will. So there could be no veritable war. We who yearned to join the ranks of an Army not yet in existence spent ourselves largely in seeking comrades, in exchanging signs of allegiance and in scanning the skies for signals of the dawn at which the ranks should serry and the true fight begin.

This state you will see was not one for the clear establishment of standards: it was not one for criticism. When we are lost and anxious we look for warmth and the assenting handclasp. We wander about in the confusing darkness. Some apparitions cheer and to these we give the accolade: others seem to threaten and at these we let fly an arrow. There are blunders and there are lucky hits. Plighted friends fall off; impulsively judged foes turn out to be friends. Measuring a chaotic world we are indeed at grips with inner chaos. The rarest consummation in America is achieved personality. To such there is no chaos anywhere.

The chaos is with us still. But we are at least so far advanced in it that we know it to be chaos. And no longer do the chaotic calls of rally . . the salvos and arrows of confusion . . impress us as ultimates in criticism or creation. We know that even as art is far more than expression, criticism is more than smiles and grimaces and frowns. We

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know that good will and a vague sense of Spirit do not suffice for a spiritual leader. We realize that the leader must have the intellectual might to control the physical and passional forces of our world: not to condone or condole or lyricize escape, but to make them over into a working milieu. And above all, we realize that criticism in its *obstetrical* function is due in America and has not yet arrived: criticism which is the determining of potential values, not the harping on values already spent; criticism which is the lifting up into the experience of the mind of the impulses that make men write and read; criticism which shall draw the battle line, direct the blows, and release at last our intellectual youth from the confusion of its larval struggle into the joy of consecrated war.

c.

I speak of criticism and of war. Much in this book, I know, is of the nature of a preface to criticism rather than the thing itself. But all of it reveals the intimation and the need of war whose lines criticism has yet to discover and announce.

It is a great war: wider than America and deeper than the issue of our generation: a war vastly more important than any clash of states or social orders. It is the war of a new consciousness, against the forms and language of a dying culture.

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The values and convictions which are in opposition have, however, remained for the most part latent. Practically all that passes for criticism in book and magazine and journal is based upon *tacit* assumptions of fundamental values which have themselves been challenged and brought into transitory flux. Practically all that passes for criticism is hence not criticism at all. In periods of admitted cultural status, criticism may dwell on the surface of personal opinion: since it shares the base of its opponent. But clearly where the base itself is of the issue, criticism must begin by articulating its own foundation and by stating its reasons for not accepting the foundations of the other side.

When new cultural foundations are erected the process is by the creating of new conceptions: *Words* whereby these foundations enter the experience of man. Such new words are forms of art. It is clear then that art today is a conspicuous issue of the cultural shift. The roots of culture are philosophical; religious, ethical, æsthetic. There can be no criticism for our modern world until there is a modern philosophical synthesis. Without it, the brightest and solemnest discussion is just as impertinent as the dullest.

Needless to say I cannot in this paper give even the most shadowy sketch of the profound cultural structure that is disappearing nor of the new one that is forming. That is the subject of many books of which I pray for the strength some day to write

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one. All that I can gather here is a sheath of statements that may at least suggest the immense seriousness of this spiritual war . . and the immense work that critics will have to do ere they can talk better than gibberish . . pleasant or unpleasant . . about the Moderns.

d.

It has been said more than once that the imperative of a culture is unity. Culture implies a Whole. If you consider the word *whole* you will see the inclusiveness of this interpretation. In the old anglo-saxon, whole is *hāl* and from it comes *hālig* which means holy. We have from this root such words as hale, health, heal. The sure articulation of our language has therefore sealed for us the ideational unity of wholeness, holiness, hale-ness and health. The Latin *religare* means to bind together, to make whole, to make one. From it we have our word religion. The two major sources of our language conjoin into this fundamental symbol. Religion in its true sense is the experience of being bound together in some universal principle related to our personal experience: *i.e.*, it is the experience of wholeness, of holiness and of health. The experience of beauty is one of harmony between a subject and an object. This harmony may be biological as in the case of a beautiful girl or horse. The beauty of a work of art is the communicable experience of a more basic

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wholeness inspired by a specific form. The great work of art invests the individual with the ecstasy of participation in the Whole. This function is not kin to the religious, it is one with it. The great primal artists were creators, prophets and sustainers of religion. This is no more true of the artists of ancient Egypt, Judea, America than of the great moderns; Æschylus, Dante, El Greco, Bach, Blake, Spinoza, Whitman, etc., etc. And it is merely our inadequate perspective that makes less clear to us the religious basis of such a work as "Don Quixote" than of such a work as the Book of Job. Moreover, there can be no cultural exchange without a unity of basis. As an instance, there was no fundamental dissonance between the assumptions underlying Plato and Aristotle, the Egyptian mysteries, the Jewish Prophetic Wisdom: else Hellenism and Christianity could not have been their organic successors.

There has been then for the entire term of History in the Western world a common culture: a common Whole. The matrix of this whole was a group of spiritual and intellectual convictions. In this matrix, the man of religion and the artist worked, and from it the peoples looked out upon the world. Here, with no attempt at thoroughness, are some of these convictions:

1. Unity is truth. This is a universe, not a multiverse.

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2. Earth is the most important part of the universe. Sun and stars revolve around it.
3. Man is lord of the world of creatures. He is physical life's highest and ultimate expression.
4. Man's reason is autonomous.
5. Man's conception of reality is fundamentally correct. This is so
 - a. Because the senses tell the truth;
 - b. or because reason corrects the senses;
 - c. or because God (Wisdom) supplements the senses and coöperates with reason.
6. God (or Gods, unified by the Greeks as well as by the Hebrews) is good and is related to man's experience.
7. The exercise of reason tends toward happiness.
8. The exercise of virtue tends toward blessedness.
9. We know what is good and what is evil.
10. We know what matter is, even if we cannot define it.
11. We know what thought is, even if we cannot define it.
12. Time and space are what they seem to be.
13. Energy and matter are indestructible.
14. The Law of cause and effect, upon which logic rests, is absolute.
15. A man may be builded of myriad individuals . . . electrons, atoms, cells, monads, etc. But man himself is not such a particle. There are no individuals of which the *instantaneous* individual

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man is possibly a cellular, atomic or relational part.

16. Intellect is three dimensional: and life is three dimensional.

These basal assumptions had various forms. Some lands stressed some of them, some epochs ignored others. Many of them were rejected by individuals whose revolt, however, did not adumbrate in the experience of the race. They provide a rough estimate of the matrix within which civilization was born, and of the foundations in which it was reared and nurtured. Thinkers, poets, scientists and priests established them. Through the æsthetic experience and the religious dogma they based the lives, however unconsciously, of billions of men and women.

They are breaking up.

The process of their destruction, *i.e.*, of the destruction of the spiritual and experiential Whole which their acceptance meant, left the sporadic and entered the organic state with such men as Copernicus, Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza. In the Nineteenth Century the process accelerated vastly. With such forces as Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Kelvin, Freud, the Non-Euclidean and n-dimensional mathematicians and with the apposite introduction into Europe of Hindu religious ideas which have always been based upon a deeper unity, the destructive work, *on the intellectual plane*, was practically rounded.

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The war of which I speak is not this intellectual process of destruction. That war was restricted largely to the scientific and philosophical planes and is mostly over. The great war is one of the whole man . . of his spiritual and emotional life: it is the world's resistance to giving up the comfort of its old cultural whole: it is the emotional refusal to admit the new truths as experience. It is the war between Inertia and the displacing experience of a new synthesis, a new culture, a new vision.

The reader who is at all aware will know that not a single one of these basal convictions has been spared, *except the first.** And the first is the categorical imperative of any culture, the expression of the social will to survive. It is a conviction whose mechanics in the individual man is analogous to the instinct of the atom or cell to adhere in the major organism.

The key to our present anguish lies in the fact that we have temporarily lost the power to support this crucial first assumption. That is the reason of our chaos and of our misery. To ascribe them to such symptoms as the European war or Industrialism or the machine is too shallow to need refutation among intelligent people. Why, for instance, should the machine make for chaos? If I want to cut a chunk of beef cannot I do it more neatly with a knife than with my fingers or teeth?

* The significant Dada movement of Tristan Tzara is an attempt to articulate the rejection of this first conviction.

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That knife is *all* machines. The machine is an extension of limb, ear, eye and mouth. The fundamental machinists were the inventors of wagons, oars, the fashioners of words, the tamers of horses. Fulton, Morse, Marconi, are epigone. But just as the machine is good in controlled hands, it is evil in the hands of a madman: in the hands of a dissociated person. If I take a knife made for cutting beef and wood, and run amuck with it among my brothers, or set it up as a god or multiply it worshipfully in such numbers that there's no place left in my house for sitting down but a blade cuts my flesh, do not be so absurd as to blame or abolish the good steel.

We are in misery because we have lost the control which comes with the experience of unity and wholeness. We are in misery because we are in chaos. We live in fragmentary thoughts, desires, acts. Quite literally, the *form* of our life is decomposing. And that means death.

We are decomposing because the experiential assumptions that held our culture together are on the wane, having intellectually been destroyed. The old spiritual body is breaking up. Ere we can be whole and hale again, we must create a new spiritual body. And that means birth.

The travail of birth, like the persistence of inertia, is an inscrutable constant. In certain aspects, we call the stress of these constants upon each other war. The war of which I speak is therefore the eternal war between a death and a birth,

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between a cultural break-up and a cultural synthesis.

It is internecine and treacherous, because of the sporadic way in which spiritual change is reported by the inadequate mind and is accepted by the conservative emotion. Philosophy has stated the break-up in the stupendous lineage which dates in metaphysic from Spinoza and in epistemology from Kant. Science has negatively proven what philosophy, which can prove nothing, stated. Science has done this after a complacent period of Positivism in which it ignored the intuitions of the poets and the statements of the philosophers who had declared in a hundred tongues and in a hundred ways the disability of positive logic to enter the domain of the *noumenal*: the disqualification of positive science from any contact with causes. But this past arrogance of science is found today only among journalists and pedagogues who are so often a century behind the times. The study of a Poincaré or of an Einstein is pure of it. Positive science has achieved its greatest dignity in the admission of Nescience: the admission of Mystery as the circumambient limit. It has prepared the intellect to receive Mystery, but it does not itself understand what Mystery is.

To the positivist mind, Mystery means something outside itself, a not-knowing, a balking and blanking of experience. Whereas the *expérience* of Mystery is the beginning of participation in a truth merely beyond the scope of our accepted words.

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The man who receives Mystery in his mind is already part of the truth: for Mystery is the first apperception of truth and is ineffable only in terms of inadequate language. Neither mystery nor truth is ineffable, as was taught by the shallow William James. What is ineffable is conventionalized language . . . the set of symbols which have crystallized a consciousness smaller than the experience attained by man. *The language that expresses Mystery is Art.*

The break-up stated by philosophy and proved by positive science, has already been articulated by Art. In solitary cases, Art has even begun to articulate the new unified experience that will again bind men together in holiness and wholeness. But these statements, portents and Words are still too scattered to have impressed the mediocre minds (functions of the inertia, not of the intellect of Man) which control our universities and schools and churches, make our laws, rule our states and write almost all our books. These inert groups still act like automata on assumptions that have lost all contact with the evolving reality of man.* Their arguments are of course insincere rationalizations of defense against the new experience

* The reality of man in my sense is that phase of Absolute reality which has entered man's experience. I believe this reality to be expanding, although it may be perfectly true that this reality in America A. D. 1900 is smaller than this reality in India B. C. 400. This reality is in relation to the "reality" of the literary realists somewhat as a sphere is in relation to a fly speck on its surface.

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which will wipe them out. For the old world, shattered, still persists. And on its side, innumerable sophistries, dogmas, decorations, graces: agile postures, fine chiselings of sarcophagus, fine choppings of logic. On the side of this death, an intricately smooth-worn pleasant language. On the side of our birth, only the harsh and guttural beauty of new Words.

These apologists of inertia are shrewd enough to know that their worst enemies are the creators of art. They know that the artist and the bringer of the Word are one. They know that their ancient forms must be savagely defended against the explosive menace of new forms, new words for the new experience of man. For purposes of defense, they have erected other assumptions beside those which I have mentioned, but for the most part also unexpressed and treacherous and latent.

They hold:

1. Intellect is three dimensional, life is three dimensional: therefore

2. Art must be three dimensional, and must remain the representative of three-dimensional consciousness.

3. Art's function is to subserve . . . as documentation, criticism, exposition, explanation, corroboration, decoration . . . the *status quo* spiritual, intellectual and ethical, in which man finds himself at the moment of encountering it. Therefore

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4. Art must adhere to accepted norms of positive science and psychology.

5. Art must remain within the stated boundaries of the consciousness of man.

Upon these tenets of self-defense there is war.

Upon the outworn bonds of a glorious but dying culture, there is war.

Upon the "honest" critics who, consciously or unconsciously, are functions of this spiritual inertia, there is war.

We hold:

1. Intellect is three dimensional, but intellect is as capable of change and transfiguration as all phases of living organism.

2. Intellect has had increasing intimations of values and dimensions of life beyond the scope of intellect's fixed symbols (language).

3. Life is vastly dimensioned beyond intellect. Intellect has, by a juncture with the supra-conscious forces of life, erected an instrument for the apperception of life in its full dimensions.

4. This instrument is Art. Art, by the elements of its creation, brings *into* the consciousness of mind quantities and values of life which mind alone is unable to perceive or control.

5. The noblest function of Art is, then, not to subserve the intellectually accepted forms of life: but to conquer new forms of life and to bring them within the reach of the intellect. Art is the lan-

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guage which expresses vision of being that has not yet been conventionalized into simple words and concepts.

6. The domain of Art is therefore precisely beyond the domains of science, philology and psychology. But these domains are as materials within the domain of art.

7. Art conquers truth for the mind which autonomously can conquer only fact.

8. Inspired intellects have glimpsed certain truths still largely alien from human experience. As that

a. Our sense of matter, space, time, thought is subjective, inadequate and untrue.

b. Only the relativity of time, space, matter, etc., is true.

c. And true as measures not of **Being**, but of our consciousness of being.

d. Hence the laws of cause and effect, the laws of logic, the laws of scientific research and experiment, the laws of mathematics are *sub specie aeternitatis* null and void.

e. What has been accepted as cause and effect and absolute sequence in time is mere juxtaposition in some superintellectual direction.

f. Hence these laws governing the mechanics and forms of art are to be superseded.

g. Our convictions of limits and individuals are merely the limits of our present consciousness and may be superseded.

9. In consequence of these convictions, the art

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which adheres to the formed phenomena of intellect and sense is a weak, retroactive, atavistic art.

10. The art that will articulate man's widening and deepening participation in life, and make this participation the base of human experience must come in the guise of forms and words for which the conventional criticism has no measure by the very definition of that criticism as an intellectual adoption from previously created forms and words.

11. Before the word is a word, it is a form of art. After the artform has become a cultural experience, it is a word.

12. Before the form of art can become a cultural experience it must by means of criticism be naturalized into the domain of the intellect.

13. Criticism can perform this function only when it contacts the work of art on a common plane of spiritual and philosophical vision.

14. In periods of basic cultural transition, therefore, the criticism which does not start out from metaphysics and a true understanding of the religious experience as I have explained the term, is idle, irrelevant, impotent and anti-social.

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2: *Emerging Greatness*

WE do not expect an Apocalypse, here in America. Out of our terrifying welter of steel and scarlet, a design must come. But it will come haltingly, laboriously. It will be warped by the steel, clotted with the scarlet. There have been pure and delicate visions among us. In art, there has been Whistler; and Henry James took it into his head to write novels. But the clear subtlety of these men was achieved by a rigorous avoidance of native stuff and native issues. Literally, they escaped America; and their followers have done the same, though in a more figurative meaning. Artist-senses have gone out, felt the raw of us, been repulsed by it, and so withdrawn to a magnificent introversion. So, when we found vision in America, we have found mostly an abstract art—an art that remained pure by remaining neuter. What would have happened to these artists, had they grappled with their country, is an academic question. But I suspect that the true reason for their *ivory tower* was lack of strength to venture forth and not be overwhelmed. This much is sure, however—and true particularly of the novel—that our artists have been of two extremes: those who gained an almost unbeliev-

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able purity of expression by the very violence of their self-isolation, and those who, plunging into the American maelstrom, were submerged in it, lost their vision altogether, and gave forth a gross chronicle and a blind cult of the American Fact.

The significance of Sherwood Anderson whose first novel, "Windy McPherson's Son," has recently appeared is simply that he has escaped these two extremes, that he suggests at last a presentation of life shot through with the searching color of truth, which is a signal for a native culture.

Mr. Anderson is no accident. The appearance of his book is a gesture of logic. Indeed, commentators of tomorrow might gauge the station at which America has arrived today by a study of the impulses—conscious and unconscious—which compose this novel. But it is not a prophetic work. Its author is simply a man who has felt the moving passions of his people, yet sustained himself against them just enough in a crude way to set them forth.

His story has its beginning in an Iowa town. His hero, with a naïve unswervingness from type, is a newsboy. His passion is money and power. He goes to Chicago. He becomes rich. He marries the daughter of his employer. And then, he becomes powerful. There is nothing new in this: although the way of telling it is fresh and sensitive. This is the romance of inchoate America. Like the Greek fables, it is a generic wishfulfillment to be garbed by each poet in his own dress. It has been done in a folk way by Horatio Alger; with a classic

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might by Theodore Dreiser. But so far, it has been the entire story. With Mr. Anderson, it is only the story's introduction.

When Sam McPherson, by a succession of clumsy assaults, charges to the control of the Arms Trust of America, he does not find there, like his novelistic brothers, a romantic and sentimental and overweening satisfaction. He finds a great disgust, a great emptiness. And he becomes interested in his soul! He learns that what he has done is spiritually nothing; that it has left him as helpless before the commands of life, as in the old days when he amassed pennies in Caxton, Iowa. It dawns on him, that if man is a measurer of truth, he has paralyzed competition, enslaved wealth, disposed of power without really growing at all. So Sam McPherson puts aside his gains; and pilgrimages forth, searching for truth.

This is the second part of the novel; and in it lies the book's importance. McPherson's quest of the grail is an awkward Odyssey indeed. It has the improbability of certain passages of Dostoyefsky—the improbability of truth poorly or clumsily materialized. Moreover, in it we find an unleashed and unsophisticated power that we have all along awaited in the American novel. The resemblance to the Russian is, I am convinced, a consequence of a like quality in the two men. It is a temperamental, not a literary thing.

The abdicated millionaire works as a bartender in Ohio, as a builder in Illinois; he joins a thresh-

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ing crew in the West and a mining camp in the South. He knows prostitutes and working-girls. He tries to help and seeks truth. He learns that labor-unions are more concerned over the use of scab machinery than by the prospect of losing a righteous strike; that the men are more interested in a raise of wages than in preventing a private band of grafters from stealing the town's water-works. He becomes very miserable over the lot of the street-walkers. He asks the drinkers in the saloon where he is employed why they get drunk, and is discharged with an oath. Puerile, fumbling stuff it is—its efficiency of presentment about on a level with McPherson's method of gaining the light. Yet through it all is a radiant glow of the truth. Read the newspapers and the Congressional reports; read the platitudes of investigating commissions, of charity organizations, of revivalists and mushroom mysticisms—and you have the same helpless thing in extension. Sam McPherson, bewildered with his affluence and power, seeking the truth in the fair plains and the cancerous cities, ignorant and awkward and eager—is America to-day. And Sam McPherson, the boy, arrogant and keen and certain, hiding from himself his emptiness with the extent and occupation of the materials that his land floods upon him, is the America of our fathers.

For a feel of the America of tomorrow, do not look to this book. I am sure that Mr. Anderson will conduct himself better in subsequent works

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than he has in the conclusion of "Windy McPherson's Son." As we find the faint footprints of Horatio Alger at the book's beginning, so at the end is the smirch of Robert W. Chambers. (But after all, Balzac could not so wholeheartedly have swallowed France, had he not taken Pixérécourt and Madame de Scudéry along.) When Sam marries Sue Rainey, it is with the understanding that they are to have children and that they are to live gloriously for them. For a while, the magnate's money-madness slackens. But the pact fails, for the children can not come. Coolness between the two, with the goal of their creed denied them:—and at length, when Sam sacrifices his wife's father in his grapple toward dominion, she flees to New York. The man over whose fat body he has stepped to power shoots himself. And, sick of his tawdry, superficial kingdom, McPherson wanders off.

He gains nothing from his experiments, and this is well enough. He hunts in Africa, leisures in Paris, canoes in Canada and sentimentalizes in New York. All this we forgive him. But one day, he finds himself in St. Louis. He encounters a drunken mother, buys her three children, packs them into a train and drops them at the feet of his wife who, like some diluted Penelope, has been awaiting his return in a villa on the Hudson. "Not our children, but just *some* children is our need," he pronounces. And so, walks "across the lighted room to sit again with Sue at his own table, and

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to try to force himself back into the ranks of life." This is the last sentence of the book; the one episode that is *made* and insincere. I hope Mr. Anderson is ashamed of it. I hope he does not really believe that all man has to do, to find God, is to increase and multiply more helpless creatures like himself. This pretty surcease to trouble that comes from transferring the problems of life to the next generation is a biological fact. But it is not art. For with it is dimmed all the voluptuous speculation which flushes the novel as a sunrise transfigures a plain. Let life be happy, when it can. The sacred duty of art is to remain sorrowful, when it has challenged a consciousness of sorrow; to abide in the uncertain search of truth so long as the movement of mankind is hazardous. Let our heroes be joyous; but by conquering themselves, not by adopting children. The virtue of Mr. Anderson's book is that it is dynamic. His static ending is bad, because it breaks the rhythm. But it is worse since it slams the door on the vista of passionate inquiry which the book unfolds. Up to the end, we have a clear symbol of America's groping. At the end, we have nothing—in lieu of the suggested everything. But, of course, we may ignore the end. Or, in its fatuous simplicity, we may read still another symbol of America—a token of what might happen to us, if we sought at this stage to read our lives as a conclusion, rather than a commencement.

I was not certain that Theodore Dreiser was a

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classic, until I had read this novel of Mr. Anderson. Its first half is a portal from which emerges an American soul. This portal is the immediate past, and in the works of Mr. Dreiser we find its definite expression. Beside their magnificent mass-rhythms, the opening chapters of Mr. Anderson are paltry. One feels, indeed, that the uneasy spirit of Sam McPherson has come forth, not from his own youth, not from his own pages, but from the choking structures of Mr. Dreiser.

Mr. Dreiser may of course yet surprise us by the sudden discovery of a new spiritual light. He has not stopped writing. But I feel in his work the profound massiveness of a completed growth. Mr. Dreiser has caught the crass life of the American, armoring himself with luxury and wealth that he misunderstands, with power whose heritage of uses he ignores. The tragedy of his hero is that of a child suddenly in possession of a continent; too unknowing to know that he is ignorant; too dazzled to be amazed. His books are a dull, hard mosaic of materials beneath which one senses vaguely a grandiose movement—like the blind shifting of quicksands or the imperceptible breathing of a glacier. This is Mr. Dreiser, and this is enough. But with Mr. Anderson, the elemental movement begins to have form and direction; the force that causes it is being borne into the air.

Before Mr. Dreiser, there was "Huckleberry Finn"—there was, in other words, a formless delirium of color and of tangent. These are pre-cul-

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tural novels. And in the book of Mr. Anderson, I still find much of them. Indeed, the wandering of Sam McPherson has more than a superficial kinship with Huck Finn's passage down the Mississippi. The land that McPherson walks is still a land marred by men and women "who have not learned to be clean and noble like their forests and their plains." But Huck Finn is an animal boy, floating rudderless down a natural current, avid for food and play. And McPherson is a man, flung against his stream, avid for the Truth. . .

In conclusion, let us not forget that this is Mr. Anderson's first book, and that a succession of them are already written and will appear in their turn. The fact that Mr. Anderson is no longer young is no hindrance to our hope of his growth. Genius in America, if it does not altogether escape America, rises slowly. For it has far to come. The European is born on a plateau. America is still at a sea-level. The blundering, blustering native was thirty-seven before he became Walt Whitman.

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Of course, as I predicted, Mr. Anderson has "conducted himself better" in his subsequent work. In many of his short stories he has achieved something very close indeed to adequate and perfect form. And yet the title of this paper stands to-day rather prophetically as a symbol, not for Mr. Anderson's personal promise as I felt it then, but for the total nature of his achievement. He has

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never in any large way ceased "emerging," or ceased "becoming." His early novels are amplifications of an æsthetic form which his short tales embody. In other words, they are æsthetic failures, since the amplification in art is no better than the dilution or the accumulation. In his latest novel "Many Marriages" he has essayed a major organism for which he should be applauded in the spirit if not in the achievement. The novel requires a composition that is kin to that of the drama or of architecture, in that it makes an intellectual demand, a demand of maturity, upon the artist which Mr. Anderson has not met. He has constructed his novel of the vapors of emotion, rather than of the forms and entities whence these vapors rise. The effluvia of passion can trace the line of a true lyric; they can not organize the bases of complex art.

In this connection, it is interesting to point out the irony in the careers of Mr. Anderson and Theodore Dreiser. The spiritual stuff of Anderson is altogether finer. He is a more beautifully sensitized man. He is more quickened by the subtle currents and juices of the American birth. And yet his works may in the perspective of time seem slighter than those of Dreiser. The reason is clear. Dreiser's subjective state did not repel him from thick contact with the American scene. His spiritual attitude sufficed to illumine dimly but consistently the American stuffs and enabled him to construct a dull, a never exalted and yet a com-

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petently dimensioned artform of “reality.” Anderson’s superior approach to the plane of creative values caused him to reject these crass materials in their obvious aspects. He left the low plane of “reality” which Dreiser in a way did master. But he lacked the spiritual power to hoist himself wholly into a more essential plane: the plane in which the materials of the phenomenal world are recreated into pure æsthetic forms. He is indeed more of a transitional artist than Dreiser. His work does not belong to the category of powerful reflective artists, nor yet does it win a place among the creators of sheer dynamic form. Far more gifted as a man than Dreiser, far more profoundly moved by the spirit of the Birth whereof I spoke in my first paper, he has yet to produce a book which outweighs as intrinsic literature the limited constructions of “Sister Carrie” or “The Financier.” His writing remains still a harbinger, rather than an experience, of Birth: an outpost: a symbol of Emerging Greatness.

In the specific form of the short story he seems to me, however, clearly the first among living American writers. Edward J. O’Brien has admirably explained how the popularity of the short story has tended to debauch the form in our current letters. But despite the competition of myriad magazine tailors, Anderson has come into the light. I hope that two other admirable American artists in the short story—Frederick Booth and Manuel Komroff—may soon have similar good fortune.

3: *Concerning a Little Theater*

WHITMAN'S man of the "divine average" will tell you that any effort is noble, and that it is better to do a thing badly than not to do it at all. You may not go as far as he does. It may seem to you that effort is often a lie and a thing ill-done a botch. Still, you can't slur your average man from his strategic place in our democratic life. And so long as he is there his tendencies are pragmatically true. Thus, in America, a bad job is often not alone better than no job at all, but an historical achievement. For any effort releases energy, displaces matter, implies leaving somewhere and getting somewhere else. And these disturbances have been at once the typical and the saving parts of the American maelstrom. Had it set, it would have been morass. Since it whirls on, it may still spread forth into silt and become the home of flowers.

An intense example of the American character is Washington Square. The neighborhood that is gathered to this name is not so much locality as mood. To the mind of America, it is a complex of what is rebellious and homeless within it. The great part of it is idleness, and license and chaos.

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The commanding residue is spirit. One of its recent conspicuous outbursts—for like all complexes it pushes upward into symptoms—has been the group known as the Washington Square Players. They emerged from the clutter of disparate effort and desire which, from all American soils and all American traditions, is repelled toward Greenwich Village. They bore the concentrated light of popular attention which is so easily mistaken for the torch of spirit. And their light has led, although it was entirely the reflected fire of those about them. From the impetus of their acclaim, other little theaters are now joyously springing up. And out of these, it is highly probable that at last an American dramatic consciousness may grow.

So after all, eventually, the “divine average” is right. In Berlin or Moscow or Paris, an organization which would quicken art would need to be a good organization. In America, all that was called for was an active organization. For America had not yet reached the ethical stage where quantity molds into quality and where impulse is naturalized as good and bad. A fit man must create: a fit infant need only scream. The Washington Square Players have been important simply and solely because they have existed.

It is our hope, however, that the end has come to this fledgling stage. Judgment is entering and torturing the blandness of our life. Alternatives of interest dull the edge of our promiscuous enthusiasm. The fact of vociferousness no longer

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passes as a sign of health. We are, indeed, struggling beyond the imitative morning into the ruthless noon of self-exploration. And if we are to achieve that intense consciousness which is the source of true expression, we must sacrifice our past. The childish things that beckoned forth our energies must be put away. But first, they must be understood. . .

With this point in view, it appears that from their humble beginnings three seasons ago to their present achievement of a theater on Broadway, the Washington Square Players have been untrue to what America expected of them, and to themselves. Their confessed program was to produce the European moderns whom Broadway designedly ignored and to give utterance to an American dramatic art which had seemed fated to be mute.

But a study of their work reveals that what these Players really wanted was to strut like their elders. On the continent of Europe was a mature dramatic art—one bound to exert a vast and unbalancing persuasion on that type of sensibility which, while it lacks the body to express, quivers to each external charm. These Players dressed themselves in the regalia of the foreign arts. And sometimes they called it Maeterlinck or Schnitzler; and sometimes they put their own names to it and called it American. Their productions of the Europeans were dwarfed approximations to themselves; their productions of native plays were for the most part inflated approximations to the Europeans.

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pressed. For the achieving of this, they would have kept their vision and their senses free. They would have avoided most what they most courted—the already formed perfection of the Europeans, which could only dim and discourage the uncertain promptings of an American art. But not alone the humility of discovering themselves, even the will to discover others, was alien to their spirit.

I have seen them in their several seasons—and the seasons are interchangeable—produce plays by many accepted masters. In their hands, Andreyev's "Love of One's Neighbor" lost all of its recurrent terror—a terror in which the artist drowns life's flaring colors to the fate of gray: Andreyev become boisterous vaudeville. In their hands the dramas of Chekhov which are a weave of close-knit emotional stresses, subtly patterned, were shredded and destroyed: all that was left was a false accentuation of the external looseness in his structures. In their hands, Schnitzler's ironism was a dead thing, and the sex-counterpoint by which he brought it out was all-important. It was not alone that they knew nothing of Austria and Russia: their superlative mishandling seemed to suggest that really the thought of background had not occurred to them.

This last season, they have produced a play by Georges de Porto-Riche—a penetrating master of modern licentious comedy in France. Now the aim of this type of gallicism is to create a dramatic convention from the spectacular emotions and vi-

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Moeller's serious playlet of the first season was a stringing of conversational pearls synthetized from Synge and Maeterlinck upon a Grand Guignol plot. And the best that can be said of his later farces is that they rank with the extravaganzas already produced annually by college seniors. Their spirit is more ugly, their wit is more sophisticated. But if the *genre* is more congenial in the hands of callow University clubs, its demoralization is more adept in the *revues* of the Parisian boulevards.

I have seen, in addition, products of New England's variant of Sardou—Alice Brown is a chief exponent; and melodramas so very near the best of Broadway that they soon found their career in the vaudeville exchanges for one-act thrillers. Indeed, where these Players have most nearly succeeded, they have seemed most nearly to approximate the commercial—and more real—theater which they were hailed to reject. It would be cruel to their excellent "Pierre Patelin" to bring to mind certain fantastic importations of Winthrop Ames—"Sumurun" and "Pierrot the Prodigal" among them. And even in their quite successful attempts at the timely folk versions of drama, such as "The Clod," they have never approached an achievement like George M. Cohan's "Seven Keys to Baldpate," which for sheer artistry, imagination, sensitiveness to the American mood would have been their masterpiece had they had the fortune to produce it.

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other side of the foot-lights—at the press and the public. A great, vague hunger greeted the Washington Square Players. They were to supplement—even to supersede Broadway. And of course Broadway had left a large group empty; even among those whom it satisfied, there were many unwilling to admit it. The Players came to create a home for cultured drama. Of course, no critic would care to be left out of such a house-warming. They arrived, trembling a bit; for they had heard of the French and Russians. And they saw these monsters, whom they had so awesomely avoided, given in a way that they could understand! This flattered the critics. They began to have a great respect for their critical powers: they began to think that after all the native drama was not so very much inferior to the drama of the Europeans. And they were unconsciously grateful to the Players who had taken the sting—and the spirit—out of the “highbrow stage.” Moreover, when they saw a native playlet that was professedly serious, and the old chords in their hearts which had so long twanged to Broadhurst and Charles Klein, twanged on, they were grateful again. For if the Players lacked background, so did the critics. If the Players took snobbish delight in being familiar with the Continentals, so did the critics. And if the Players enjoyed their masquerade in the gesture and habiliments of the Adult Drama, so did most of their audience. It was a happy family of children, playing house . . . playing mother and

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father and uncle . . . playing adult business and pleasure. Making believe in the way of children. And doubtless, in the process, sharpening their wits.

But there the analogy between individual and social growth breaks suddenly away. In the racial progress, a group stands statically for what in the individual is a mood or a period of time. In personal history, the children who play at being father and mother evolve and achieve what they emulate. In the social organism, new groups emerge, slough off the older units and assimilate the progress through which these have found expression. And as a personal mood is superseded, so a social group is destroyed. With this vision, the work of the Washington Square Players is significant; their childishness becomes the constructive practice-play of later functionings that will be carried on by later groups.

The impulse which barred these Players from the possibility of a direct communion with America was a thoroughgoing false one. During the last decades, human spirit in Europe has been in revolt. It has had a rich cultural soil from which to spring and soar. And art, as the expression of spirit, has revolted also. It has ceased to be extensive, to delineate the manifest in life. It has reached up into essences and abstractions. And it has been able to do this, since prior to the revolt, art had shot through with light and understanding the actuality that then existed. This was the art

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typified by Balzac and Hugo, by Schiller and the German lyrists, by Gogol and Pushkin:—the art of pure extension, the art known as popular and great. Rooted in the soil thus labored, art could afford to soar. And finally, when it has clarified the new domains of human aspiration, when Europeans have caught up with it and become merged with it, a new period of equilibrium will follow—a new period of popular art. But in America, the situation is not germane. These spirits of revolt—Andreyev, Wedekind, Maeterlinck, **Romains**—are not true for us. They have not reached up through labored fields that are our own. Absorption in them is a natural growth for their countrymen; for the American it is a dangerous trick. And its consequence must be to cleave us from reality as completely as it intensifies reality for the European.

We have our own fields to plow; our own reality to explore and flush with vision. Let us do this first; humbly and doggedly as lowly toilers must.

POSTSCRIPT

Well, this particular little theater disappeared. And a great many, the country over, disappeared. We no longer merely import the play, but the players also! Stanislavsky has been here, and Balieff, and the Comédie Française: and now the Grand Guignol and the Ballet Suédois and Max

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Reinhardt and Signora Duse. Good and welcome! What an opportunity for learning, for sharpening our own tools and our wits. But the question arises: since upon each august appearance from Abroad the critics fall flat on their faces in obsequious salaam, how can we see? how can we learn? how can they help us sharpen our own tools?

America's continued prostration before whatever comes here from abroad, clad in prestige and the pathos of distance, is disheartening for two reasons: Because prostration is not the same as intelligent receptivity except perhaps in the case of the biological female, and because so much of what comes over is past its prime and already faisandé. We gobble everything, and we digest so little! Money buys so readily all the substitutes and the adulterations of experience. Do we want great art? Easy: just import it. Pay a million (incidentally, make a million) and the men who have toiled long years in Moscow, Paris or Berlin will wrap up their product and bring it gayly over. Can't we learn that when we buy like that, we receive nothing? Can't we learn that the visit of neighboring artists into a humming creative milieu means inspiration and joy and augmented truth: but that their coming into our empty and pretentious lobbies humiliates them and weakens us with an additional excuse for not creating on our own?

It is a sad truth that men can get along with Ersatz. Many a lyric page of Paul Rosenfeld's

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has made this clear. Men lose their appetite for the real thing, if they swill fakes too long. I have no word to say against our visitors, even though most of them arrive here in their dotage. What we import is not as a rule the athleticism and resonance of their work, but the Noise of their fame. And I submit that even the Moscow Art Theater at Al Jolson's Music Hall with Mr. Hearst in the front seat is not an inspiration: that Eleonora Duse at the Metropolitan where there can be a "gate," rather than at an intimate theater where possibly some might have seen and understood, will not galvanize any spirits among us that may be drooping. O! for a bit of supple and self-assertive action in our world of art—something to make the smell of Broadway less rancid, and the look of our magazines less like that of an anæmic cripple parading in brocades. . .

4: *Vicarious Fiction*

OUR centers of civilization differ from those of Europe in this: that they are cities not so much of men and women as of buildings. The imperious structures that loom over us seem to blot us out. And if our life is vital, we win our knowledge of it rather in what oppresses us than in ourselves. Indeed, we have lavished our forces altogether on the immensities about us, turned our genius into steel and stone, and to these abdicated it. There is a chasm between the created thing and the creator; and everywhere we are the underling and the unformed. We find ourselves smaller than our buildings, and yet we know that until we are greater than the vastest of these, we shall be no true nation. The march of our struggle to win back our power is the American drama.

To an astonishing degree, we have objectified our lives. And we have failed to hold within us the power to experience what we put forth. The results of this have been far-reaching. Not alone our buildings crush us: the laws that we so prodigally spin are shackles; the traditions which in our old homes were the ground beneath our feet, here weigh upon our heads. For all the splendor of our

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achievements, we have not approached that mastering consciousness which alone can make man greater than the parts of his existence.

The old visions, focussed to old lights, that we brought with us, seem to have been unequal to the task of knitting our American welter of unrelated facts. So, as the chaos cools and the specific groups congeal, we find ourselves inexorably set within them. Each of our little clusters of activity has become a world.

And we are now where the process leads. We have become powerful in particular technics; we have studied the materials of living. But politics and trade and human law are not pivots of existence; and to exalt them so, is to lower ourselves; is to become, like them, the creatures and symptoms of uncharted forces. If we stand today more submerged than ever in the American Fact, the reason is that all of us are clinging to some part of it that lies cluttered with the rest.

We have the insufferable sense of a wide futility, of the want of sensitive reaction between ourselves and the whole. And we escape our chaos, not by steeping it with an inclusive vision, but by making ourselves comfortable in it. Our intellectuals are no exception. With a religious earnestness, they fix on whatever element in life is sweetest to their mental habit. They pore over the sentimental or the mechanical or the political man. They deny the existence of what moves beyond their radius and so wall themselves into a smug seclusion. So

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that today, the superb American opportunity is threatening to break into a wilderness of purposes, tangled, unfriendly, sterile; to shrink into a herd of little men, cowed by the unleashed grandeur of their forces.

What we require is vision. Man is the culmination of the blind life that spews him up, only when he has *felt* that life, when it is fused into his consciousness. His power of vision is his power to experience; to make the boundaries of existence the boundaries of his spirit. Only in so far as he feels infinitude within himself is he a master. And all the elements of nature, all the materials of his hand are hard things indeed to make his own. Intuitively, man has felt this issue and realized that he must be forever re-creating life into a form that he can grasp, if he would not be submerged. And one of the ways of his effort is religion; and the other way is art. By art, he lifts up the more hidden bases of existence and makes them his experience; he achieves that sense of unity and *at-homeness* with an exterior world which saves him from becoming a mere pathetic feature of it.

In all ages, this conduit to mastery seems to have been open to mankind. It is not an intellectual thing. We make our own not what we think, but what we feel. And since through art, the essence and depth of being enters our senses and is absorbed by us, the scope of a people's mastery over life may be indeed the scope of a people's art. Moreover, there have been primitive races rich in these

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conduits to dominion, even as there have been others, deft and powerful in the mechanics of existence, yet helpless to control them.

The tragic thing is that art also can lose itself in the surface complexities of a civilization; can end by becoming a mere expression of the materials from whose tyranny it rightfully should free us. This, in fact, is the situation that confronts America. And it is amply typified by the contemporary English novel which today holds so large a place in the American mind.

There is no mystery in the strategic power of the novel. The palette of the novelist is substantially the life around him. This he directs to the æsthetic end, quite as the painter handles pigment. An industrial world turns naturally to that art whose language is so near to its industrial pre-occupation. Moreover, it seems right enough that of all novels, those of contemporary England should appeal to the cultured reader of America. The one formed tradition of our past that has not altogether gone in the diffusion of many races, is the English. And all these novelists write competent, timely and engaging works in a language which is our own. We have no rivals for them here.

But Americans are attracted to these writers not through their inspiration but because of the material that they employ. And they confound the two. At all times, the artist takes what is at hand. If he is a painter of the Renaissance, he will use the conventions and symbols of his Church. If he

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is a novelist of New York, he will depict the frangor of machinery, the strident unrest of man beneath the tyranny of men. These are his stuffs. But if his art is great, it will have its source in truths of which these are the symptoms. If it fails in this, it is bad art: for it lacks the roots by which the vitality of life's source can reach us. And its influence is ill, for it comes to us lacking the sustenance that we require of it.

In this light, consider H. G. Wells. Somewhere in "Tono-Bungay"—somewhere near the book's conclusion—Mr. Wells has his hero say: "I might have called this novel *Waste*." Now, the canvas of "Tono-Bungay" is a wide one. On it are flung (ostensibly) the color and line of modern enterprise: the passion of the struggle, the pathos of the victor. And at the end, Mr. Wells thinks that all of it is *waste*. The reason is not far to seek. Mr. Wells has one engrossing thought: to lay low the capitalistic state. His purpose is commendable. Most of us share it with him. Most of us would have agreed that "all of it was *wrong*." In fact, the true artist would have made this one hundredfold more clear, simply because he must have made his picture one hundredfold more true. The point is, that to no artist can life be waste however far, in its present symptoms, it fail of a specific economic doctrine. And the point is, farther, that with this attitude, no novelist can present life at all. Mr. Wells does not. If he can sensibly say that the thing he shows is waste, the reason is that this

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thing is not life but merely a certain surface, a certain result of living. It is this alone that occupies him. Nor do we quarrel with him, because of his concern with political mechanics. When Mr. Wells writes "New Worlds for Old," he is strong. But his novel is an anaemic, superficial semblance, concocted mentally, of life. And it is this because it is altogether wanting in what marks off a work of art from the most compelling tract.

It is the same with his other novels. As a work of art, "Mr. Polly" is a feeble thing; its method and color are plainly acquired from Dickens. We rush unchallenged through mild pages of genre-work; and then betimes Mr. Wells strikes to his true occupation and holds us with a paragraph quoted from some enlightened economist in London, and put there to illumine that external and unfortunately necessary thing, his story. The idea of "Mr. Polly" is not impregnate in his book; the conclusions forced on us are not the integral results of Mr. Polly's life. On the one hand is the weak creative gesture; on the other is the acute political theory. The consequence is an unfused novel, warped from the meager composition it does possess by the thrust-in of quite excellent political doctrine. And without these isolated paragraphs from the economist of London, no educated person would have bothered twice about the book.

The later novels sin still more flagrantly, since with an unflagging journalistic instinct, Mr. Wells has increased his canvas. As politics bellied out

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and burst in the World War, so “The Research Magnificent” transcribes the globe—and “Mr. Britling Sees It Through.” This last novel leaves one amazed at how maturity has muddled the fine early style of Mr. Wells. If, in this book, one gropes through three hundred pages of journalistic writing that sound like a hasty handbook clipped together from a thousand daily columns, one arrives at last at the one thing Mr. Wells was interested in, from the beginning. This thing has been the subject of many serious volumes: Lowes Dickinson’s “The European Anarchy,” Romain Rolland’s “Audessus de la Mêlée,” Walter Lippmann’s “The Stakes of Diplomacy” among them. One wonders why Mr. Wells felt himself constrained to brush through so much tiresome depiction of the humanities, before he allowed himself his thesis. For in the process, he has maimed his material and missed his goal. The splendid subject of the state of England turns, in his hands, to *impedimenta*. And his political faith falls down, simply because he has pivoted it, not on an honest mental base, but on a falsely motivated novel. “The Research Magnificent” is even a worse hybrid. It holds several striking pictures—a mob in China, warfare in the Balkans. But its grasp of source and impulse is really on a level with that of a cinema like “Intolerance,”* where, with a like good purpose of pursuing an idea, five conti-

* By that arch-purveyor of the bogus, Mr. D. W. Griffith whose æsthetic relationship with Mr. Wells is unfortunately close.

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nents and thirty centuries are flashed before us. The same grandiose externality, the same blindness to the deeper dimensions of life stamp and shrivel these two works. In the film a false ethical view, in the novel a splendid political passion, excuses the panorama. But in both there is the same untrue divorce between idea and material which is the unfailing mark of falsity in art.

Now, it is plain not alone that novels may include the political factor, but that great novels are unlikely to escape it. Rabelais and Cervantes summed up scholasticism and the Feudal Age, foretold the sweep of individualism, projected a whole vast human epoch. Similarly Stendhal called his "*Le Rouge et le Noir*," which appeared in 1830, a *chronicle of the Nineteenth Century*; and in a way so deeply prophetic was this true, that France herself was not aware of the grandeur of the book until the century was done. In his book, Stendhal traced the bitter aftermath of individualism, its rise and fall, told the tragedy of post-Napoleonic France, and furnished an undying commentary, a hundred years at least before the fact, for socialism. But the political factor in the works of these great artists sprang—like politics itself—from a deeper source. Their need was to create life in a sensory mold. And such formulation of the complete human impulse may well include the political in art, as indeed it must, in life. But all this is totally removed from Mr. Wells who starts not with the intuitive need of creation, but with the intellectual

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program of discussion; who begins with the end-symptom where art may incidentally leave off.

Mr. Wells in his books is like ourselves in life. He has failed to impregnate his materials with his ideas. He flounders through his works and ends adrift, because his impulse is not channeled from a source beneath the confusion of his senses, but is itself a symptom of that confusion.

Consider another of our favorites: Arnold Bennett, who, also, is a force thrown out by the industrial hysteria of Great Britain. Mr. Bennett would seem the antithesis of an up-rooted æsthete like George Moore, but this deep quality unites them: that they have both discovered the realists of France. Mr. Bennett has read these masters carefully. And he has observed that their outstanding character is a profound devotion to details. Mr. Bennett thinks he can "do" detail, himself. He finds plenty of it—and finds it master—in his own "Five Towns." His one error is in his understanding of why detail abounds in the novels of his patterns: and of what he should have done with his own crop of it, at home.

It is impossible here to trace the genesis of French realism: to show how thoroughly it expressed the post-revolutionary search for consciousness, and the revolt from the sort of search that the Encyclopedia set up. France, in her recurrent bewilderments—the intellectual mechanism of Voltaire, the accession of the *bourgeoisie*, the body-blow of Prussia—needed an Inventory. While

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England was still mulling over Dickens, the art of France passed on to an evaluation of what that Inventory gave her: to impressionism, and in the novel to such masters as Charles-Louis Philippe and Anatole France, André Gide and Jules Romains. But the point is, that the accumulations of *genre* notings in Balzac, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert and Zola were simply fuel for their inspiration. Details occupied their novels because their impulse toward orientation had need of them; because their spirit required material, as a furnace requires coal. If the "Comédie Humaine" narrates more details than any other work, the reason is the consuming vastness of the spirit of Balzac. They are the means by which the need of light in Balzac could burst to flame. The details in Balzac are incandescent. The details in Mr. Bennett are sodden. In the case of the one, creation glows through his pages and transfigures them. In the case of the other, the detail is everything. It serves nothing. It proclaims itself master in his books as it is master in his world. It lacks the interstices of light. . .

With John Galsworthy, however, we have a direct artist, one in whose better work the æsthetic impulse is unrefractedly at play. But if we look deep enough, we find that here also, the creative need is weak. Mr. Galsworthy is inspired by the malady of his own senses, by the fragility of his own sinew rather than by the lush urge of a race spirit coursing through him. Often, he reaches into pleading and propaganda—as in his plays: we find

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him sinning the sin of the school of Mr. Bennett, reliance on unquickened incident, emphasis on massed detail. But when Mr. Galsworthy is most authentic, he lapses into an extended and exotic dirge that gives him quite away: he dwells on the withering of lopped-off social limbs, the iridescent whirlings of secluded problems. His spirit is a gorgeous, past-nourished flower, uprooted and athirst and rotting with the fair glow of putrefaction.

At bottom, these men are one—and supplement each other. They fail to cut below the upper levels of life. And in consequence, their readers cannot win from them the vision which profound experience affords. Mr. Galsworthy weaves from his helplessness an expression that is at least sincere. The others escape theirs, by ponderous and specific study of the chaos that has overwhelmed them—by an obsession with the mechanics and details of existence. All of them create not out of strength, but weakness.

Indeed, it would look ill for the English Novel, were it not for two men who stand out clearly as exceptions. D. H. Lawrence, author of "Sons and Lovers," and J. D. Beresford suggest at last the vital rebirth of an art which in England has been largely given over since the Eighteenth Century to unquickened spirits. In the novels of Mr. Beresford, a superb sense of the present moves with a pregnant racial restlessness. We feel in him that England is once more to be strong. But while Mr.

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Lawrence and Mr. Beresford indubitably point to a potential England, they do not primarily concern us here: for they are practically without influence in our country. . .

America needs, above all things, spiritual adventure. It needs to be absorbed in a vital and virile art. It needs to be lifted above the harry of details, to be loosed from the fixity of results. And it is devoted to an art whose chief attribute is abdication of what it most requires.

We are bound to England by our childhood, by our traditions and habits. We are bound to England by our weakness. And we glean from our alliance chiefly the weakness of England. Her reflected form of art we choose to reflect once more. Her momentary surrender to the chaos of new industrial conditions, we gladly lean on and make to justify our own. The artists of England who are here most in vogue are precisely those artists who have begged their own spiritual question.

The truth is that we shun the artists who would force us to face ourselves, who might inspire us to work upon ourselves. It is easy at any rate to read about the troubles of other countries; to make remote lands suffer and vicariously solve, to the exclusion of our own reality. Devoted as we are to the consideration of surface parts of our dilemma, we find great joy in books that repeat the tendency. Our spiritual lack makes us read, as theirs makes these authors write. We go to them, since they flatter our weakness, and save

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our effort. We go to them because, spiritually and geographically, they are remote enough not to prick our bubbles. It would be experience to read Theodore Dreiser; it is only the witnessing of a gladiatorial combat to read Mr. Wells.

Similarly, we ignore Walt Whitman. For Whitman offers no help in the mechanics of existence. His political ideas are inadequate to our immediate problem. And this lack in our greatest poet is the touchstone of his disfavor. We have a consuming fondness for the pat and special seer—be he political or scientific. We cannot forgive the man who would drag us into grips with the entire, uneasy problem.

Our sickness is the kind that resists cure: our symptoms are the sort that crave encouragement. The naïve find their opiate in the magazines; the more sophisticated find theirs in the contemporary English Novel. A smaller group, more highly sensitized, achieve their mood of righteousness by reading of reality as it exists in Russia. But all alike, we seek the comfort of the Limit, the ease of what is at once specific and remote. We weaken our receptivity for a provocative and dynamic art. . .

POSTSCRIPT

I tried to say so much in parvo in this paper, that I grew inarticulate. Did I really lift into clarity what is wrong with Wells, Bennett and Co.? I think not. I was a moralist rather than a critic.

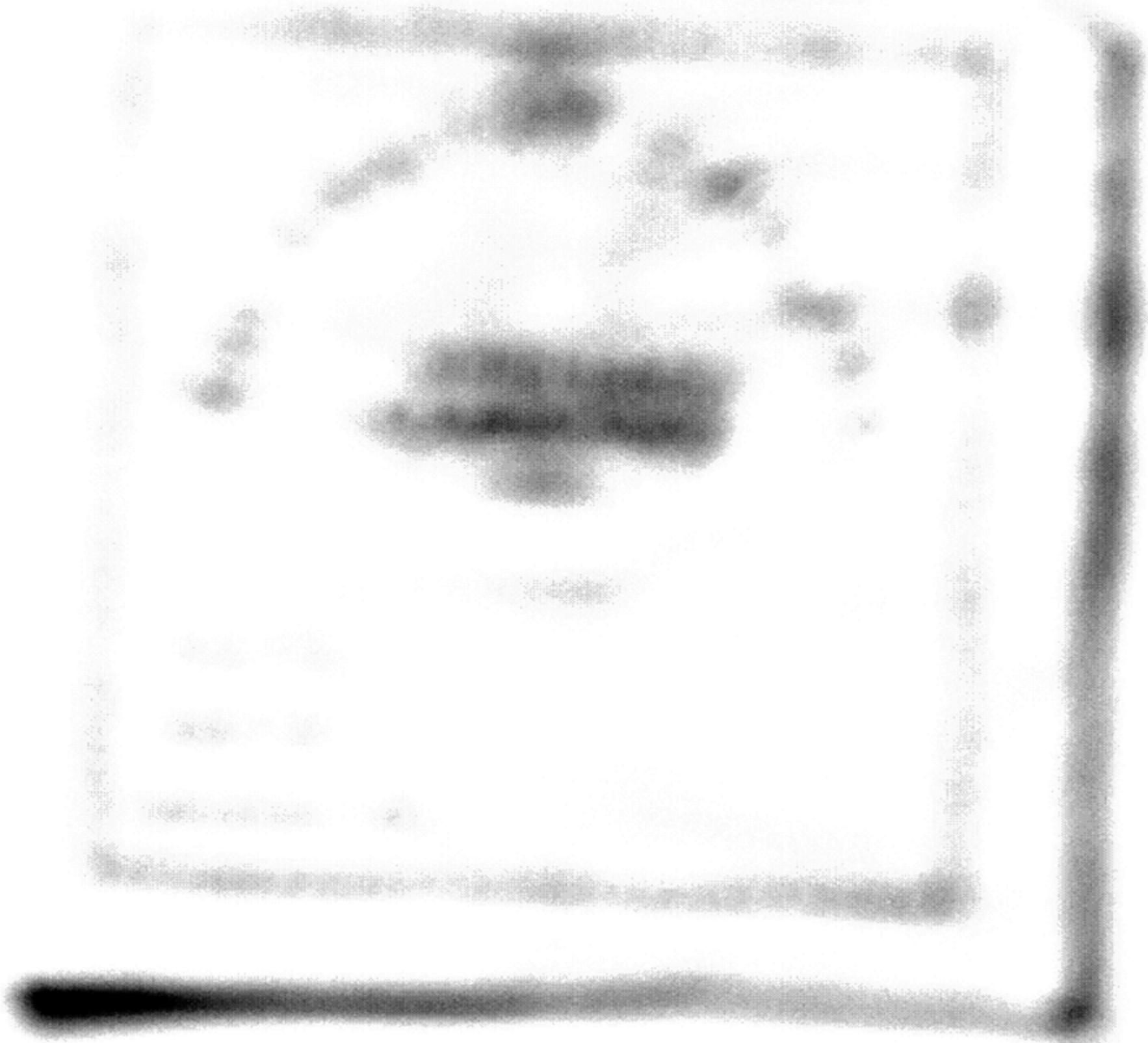
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Had I been more the critic, my moral had been sharper and more substantial. The point is of course that the full-born artist controls his material. He is an instrument of universal will and his specific materials become universals under this control. All of these men are unathletic and despite their popularity feeble: for they are victims of their materials. And Mr. D. H. Lawrence in a nobler way is the victim of his own personal emotions which is, I fear, quite as bad. For the personal emotions when directed to ends of personal will are anaesthetic: personal feeling and personal will must also be controlled as instrumentalities of a will that transcends the personal. Only so can they create the ecstasy which is the æsthetic experience and which is the individual's participation in universal being. In his later novels, Mr. Lawrence uses his gorgeous colors and his rich passionnal designs to drive home a personal grievance and a personal judgment. This is gross violation of the æsthetic law. His books lack the organic forms, the dimensioned integration of the materials of life which can result only from the transcendence of the personal problem and the personal passion into a vision which partakes mechanically of the force that organizes and dimensions life.

By the way: I have in this essay omitted to name the two most genuine prose artists of contemporary Britain: Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce. Both have added greatly to the comedic tradition of the English novel. As to the

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spirit of tragedy, it seems to have gone out from England . . perhaps in the disguise of battleships and colonizers.



1917

5: *The German Theater in New York*

IT is hard to be critical about the work one sees in the German theater on Irving Place. The lack of work one sees at most of the other theaters unfits one for it. It is easier to be merely eulogistic; or, if one turns away from it toward Broadway, to become a scold. For it would seem the natural thing in American New York, for the native drama to have all the advantages. And if this is so, since it is the Germans who act best, direct best, produce the best results in the entire city, it might appear logical enough to give them a testimonial of congenital superiority and let it go at that.

The truth, however, is just the other way: it is the Americans who have against them all the odds; it is the Germans who have with them all the advantages. Of course, I am talking of the theater and of those specific qualities and things that the theater needs. If an Arabian fantasy is produced on Broadway, you will be sure to find on the stage a true Arabian steed. You will be sure to find new scenery for even the oldest of ideas; real settings for the most wooden situation. On the stage of Irving Place, they would use a cab-horse; and more

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than once I have found a "Lady of Lyons" drop furnishing the background of a Strindberg comedy. But all considerations of this kind seem to dwindle when one thinks of the essentials. One no longer pities the folk-theater on Irving Place. One is inclined to be indulgent toward our own leading managers.

For instance, the Germans have, in their theater, two actual communities: one on either side of the footlights. Their house is not reliant on anonymous and chaotic crowds that drift toward a particular box-office rather by virtue of their own indirection than the specific draw of a particular play. About Broadway buzz the fly-swarms; and the managers, if they would catch them, must employ fly-paper. At the Irving Place there is a conscious unit—a living organism whose interest is *normally* directed toward its theater and among whose natural demands are those precise cultural reagents that their theater can supply. The audience is in a real sense a community; and a community of consumers. It is knit together racially and emotionally, so that its intellectual appetite is neither "high-brow" nor "low-brow" but fundamental. And its attitude of a permanent need makes it not only steadfast in its patronage but humble before the dramatic masters whose fare it is conscious of requiring.

The shifting audiences of Broadway respond to the momentary titillation of a "show" which, in its turn, responds to the impulse of some special source.

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That source may be intellectual or foreign or vulgar or nugatory. It never completes the circle. The bourgeois Germans, on the other hand, who watch Sudermann or Tolstoi or Schiller at the Irving Place, find in these writers the same spirit, the same emotion—although formed and charted—that have made them want to go to the theater. They make up not merely a community, but a community at one with a community of playwrights.

But they are also a community at one with a community of actors. The Irving Place Theater supports a permanent company of forty players all of whom receive their salaries whether the play of the moment requires their services or no. The company is composed of artists drawn from practically all the leading theaters of Austria and Germany. It is, of course, a varying group. But its nucleus is constant and its spirit is strong. The newcomer is soon merged into the whole. It need scarcely be said that this group represents a power of traditional, cultural and intellectual experience which no Broadway theater with its quicksand castes, its shallow background and its impermanence, can hope to rival. These Germans belong to their theater. They are steeped in its religion of integrity; they know its literature as a monk knows his prayers. They also are a unit, crystallized by the demand of their audience for an expressive dramatic art. In this sense they also are compact, conscious and self-sufficient.

Mr. Hans Bartsch, the sensitive, deeply civilized

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individual who serves as manager between these two communities, brought me a succinct picture of the spirit that enlivens them. It was found necessary, some months ago, to discharge the chorus that had served in a highly popular musical comedy. That seemed the end of the comedy—successful as it was. Only ten members of the company had parts in it. The remainder immediately volunteered to act as chorus. Among them were stars—all of them were artists who took important rôles in important plays. This little incident expresses a great truth. The theater is, of all arts, the most communal and the most traditional. Is it a miracle that the common productions at the Irving Place excel our most laborious and feted efforts? With all our external pomp and bustle, our lavishing of time and money, we cannot bring forth what these communities have within themselves.

In the ordinary course of their business, the Irving Place Theater has produced this year Ibsen's "Wild Duck," Strindberg's "Comrades," Tolstoi's "The Living Corpse" and "The Concert" of Hermann Bahr. These are plays of diverse and difficult power. They have been produced with a subtlety of rendition, a perfection of delineation, a unity of grasp that are simply and unequivocally unheard of on the American stage. Yet no one of these plays was rehearsed more than six times before the *première*! But, as was explained to me by the gentleman who acts as the manager between the two communities: "Long before, all of

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these artists knew all of the plays—and the authors' philosophy—by heart."

Truly, we must be more kindly in our attitude toward the Broadway theaters. With their lack of real plays, their lack of real companies of actors, their lack of real audiences, it would be sheer unfairness to compare them with the Volks-theater on Irving Place.

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Shortly after I wrote this piece, the War to Make the World Safe for Broadway Productions swept away the German Theater at Irving Place. It has never returned. A little later, two actors of genius, Ben-Ami and Celia Adler, brought an organization known as the Jewish Art Theater to even greater heights in the old Madison Square Theater. Their productions, among others of the significant plays of Peretz Hirschbein, were far more luminous and dynamic than the meticulous and rather shoddy stuff which Stanislavsky wearily purveyed to the Snobbery of Broadway. I do not believe, however, that the Snobbery went down in large force to sustain Ben-Ami and Celia Adler in their tremendous art. It did better: it sent Broadway managers to entice them with dollars. Ben-Ami was swallowed in the insignificances of our uprooted theater. And a potentially complete theater was once more stripped by blandishments of fame and money: by a power that functions on a low plane where it

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can touch only the artist who descends. The Jewish Art Theater is still there. Its program is still ambitious, but, at this writing, its productions are rather debile imitations of its recent glory. Once more, genius lacking in the humility of self-knowledge has been led astray. If Ben-Ami reads this, let me urge him, before he is too late, to scurry back to his obscure outlandish stage, where a Hirschbein and a Pinski wait to outshine all the coruscations of Broadway.

Meantime, the Yiddish Art Theater is still there. Perhaps, ere too long another Ben-Ami may arise from its ranks. May he realize that notice in the Times and electric lights are not as intrinsic nourishment for drama as the rich soil of his language and of his people. Broadway can do no good to Ben-Ami, because he does not come from Broadway. To Fannie Brice Broadway can do no harm. For that excellent artist is nourished by the jazz materials which Broadway represents. She is an expression of the folk-poetry and folk-music of our steel and Mazda age. She is jazz. All homage to her. She would be quite as lost spouting Yiddish on the East Side, as a Ben-Ami is lost speaking English uptown. The artist, like an advancing army, should keep close to his source of supplies.

6: *A Prophet in France*

I.

THE War has done away with the swarms of literary schools that in time of peace make a battlefield of Paris. With the War, the source of most of them died out. They sprang from the intellectual surfeit, the emotional groping and indirection, all the cultural ease that a fertile race produces as by-products of its future. They went like flowers in flame. And when the War is over, new swarms of them will rise—their number limited alone by the ingenuity of their leaders to find names for them. But there were exceptions to the general death. As the combative genius of France shook down to its widest levels, some of the groups that had been lost with their fellows appeared to be looming up. It became evident that they were not, like the others, mere cerebral mists, incidental births of excess energy. They, and their social movements below the War, rested on the same foundations. So that, when the War bared these seismic structures, their impulse came into the light.

Among these exceptions, two movements stand out. The men banded together by the *Nouvelle*

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Revue Française are perhaps the greatest in accomplishment. The varied works of the late Charles Péguy, of André Gide and Paul Claudel—to mention only three—are a superb expression of the present experience of France. But another group, although far poorer in achievement, is perhaps more closely quickened with the future. *Unanimisme* is still a sketched, rather than an elaborated art. But perhaps this is to be expected of a movement wilfully nourished by an ideal tendency.

The founder of this school is Jules Romains. In 1908, when he was a recent graduate in philosophy at Paris, he brought out the volume of verse that established it and named it: "La vie unanime." Since then he has written novels, poems, plays and a manifesto which met the French passion for classifying art. But it is apt that the first book of this essentially prose writer should have been a poem; for 1914 left him still at the threshold of his work; and despite the vista of its promise, its accomplishment is still no more than a sharp lyric note.

The striking feature of the art of Jules Romains is that his characters are not individuals, but collective groups: complex and dynamic units created out of the stress and passion of society. He pictures the soul, not of the occupants of a room, but of the room itself; not of a soldier but of a regiment; not of travelers but of their railway-carriage; not of rebels but of the riot. He is concerned with the new creatures of the new age: with

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the group-individuals molded by economic forces and endowed with sense and nerves, direction and temper like the more simple organisms that compose them.

The most compelling revolution in an art, when it has won its place, appears as the logical next step. If we regard human endeavor since the Renaissance as a single march, the effort of Jules Romains is simply a most recent outpost. Individualism was the swing away from the anonymous group-culture whose soul still stands expressed in the Gothic cathedral and the Gregorian chant. Since this revolt, Europe has sought to right its balance. Individualism has had the constant impulse to broaden out and to include the group. But there has been a deep reluctance against this need. It is almost as if a racial memory existed of how the older group-cultures had been achieved: a profound resolve that a community of such undifferentiated mass, made at such individual sacrifice, must not re-appear. The ideal group toward which individualism tended was to be one composed of highly conscious, self-active parts. With it, all of the individual—nourished through the last centuries—would have to fuse: and during the process all of the individual must be kept alive.

This dual activity has often blinded us to the deeper unifying movement. On the one hand, was the passionate cult of the individual; on the other, such gross impersonal programs as those of the old socialists who seemed to be merely paraphrasing

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the Roman Church. It has been hard to see these two developments as factors in a single birth: one in which the newly organized individual would create the transfigured group. Man and men were working toward an amalgam. But the process was still being carried out in separate chambers. It was as if the two component parts needed intensive tempering and perfection before they could be brought together. The laboratory of the Group was, broadly, that of science and economics: the laboratory of the Individual was left to art. But now, we find each movement eyeing the workshop of the other: studying more and more the profound purpose that underlies the two. In the experiential field of literature, however, there was no æsthetic based on a consciousness of the new Group, before Jules Romains.

But we can trace the antecedents of his art without leaving France—almost without leaving the modern novel which, in my judgment, the vision of Jules Romains will revolutionize. The eighteenth century built up a mass-architecture of the intellect and romanticism was a revolt from it. The standard was in Rousseau; the enemy was in Voltaire. Benjamin Constant and Châteaubriand were individualists to the extent that the heroes of their novels appear to float about in a sort of ether. And yet, no sooner did the romantic novel take to itself substance and reality than the tendency swung back to a group and social consciousness. The very program of Balzac's "Comédie Humaine"

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makes this clear: his absorption in the scientific studies of men like Buffon, Bonnet, Saint-Hilaire and Lamarck. He looked on the human order as an exalted and complex zoology. We feel behind his gigantic individuals the brilliant and brutal stirrings of real group movements: the palpable inter-action of the modern guilds and the economic castes. In Stendhal, the movement is gaining consciousness. Julien Sorel, hero of "Le Rouge et le Noir" and the Fabrice of "La Chartreuse de Parme" are in reality mere individual grains ground slow but exceeding small in the mills of the new social structures. The picture of the Battle of a Waterloo in this latter book—and of Fabrice as a mere molecule within it—is a direct harbinger of the technique of Jules Romains.

With Zola we have progressed still further. What is true today—and immortal—in his twenty-volume history of "Les Rougon-Macquart" is not the decadent family and the false naturalistic method, but the tide-like human floods that move beside his Seine, the rich, sluggish peasant streams that he makes flow in the valleys of Beauce.

Still, these mass-creations were largely unconscious. The preponderance was personalistic, although it was a preponderance that dwindled. In Constant's "Adolphe" the group is non-existent; in Balzac the group is mastered by the individual; in Flaubert and Goncourt, the individual goes down before the group—but unconvinced; and in the later novel, we find the individual saving himself

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by a complete withdrawal. The group is either passive, a thing to be transcended; or it is destructive, a thing to be avoided. With Jules Romains, it becomes, for the first time, the Hero.

But we are still at small beginnings. A thousand spectators of a play have become one theater; a thousand neighbors have become one street; ten thousand toilers are a town. Jules Romains has blocked out his Paris, almost his France, in these moving masses, small and large—and each complex with its own varied impulse. But he has not organized his masses, not endowed them with their complete social functions, not fitted them one into the other. He has merely inaugurated a technique—or rather, he has sprung a source of vision that for a long march of time may lead the way.

II.

How Jules Romains came to this consummation may be felt in the development of his older contemporary, Maurice Barrès. M. Barrès began with that type of individualism that conserved itself by withdrawing from reality. His first three novels are grouped under the title, "Le culte du Moi." Thence his egoism spread forth until at last it had become the nationalism of his later group of novels, "Le roman de l'énergie nationale." Consciousness had wreathed out from Maurice Barrès himself, to Lorraine, and thence to France. The

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evolution was simply from a unicellular to a multicellular state.

We find the same adumbration in the one book of Jules Romains that exists in English. "The Death of a Nobody" * is perhaps the most perfect and the least advanced of his novels. The author had not got too far afield in it, with his experimental method. The hero of the book is still an individual. But the tendency is clear in his choice of a person so insignificant that his life apart from the group counts for nothing. The narrative is the gradual infiltration of this individual into the anonymous life of France. Jacques Godard is dead on page 17; and with this barrier of his body once removed, the process begins. We follow the *concierge* big with the news of his lodger's death, dripping his secret into the life of Paris. As the funeral procession moves through the serried streets, all who observe it are enlarged by it. Godard becomes a portion of life. And his peasant father, striking through the packed communities of France to attend the funeral, gives of his news and of his son to each absorbent group that blocks out his way.

France is a unanimous land indeed: the logical birthplace of this æsthetic. Even its dissensions bear the marks (and bitterness) of family quarrels. We feel the luminous complexity of France

* Published by B. W. Huebsch, New York. "Lucienne" is to be published by Boni and Liveright, in a translation by Waldo Frank.

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in this novel: we understand how the dead Jacques Godard shreds and drifts and is absorbed into the emotions of a people. And in this picture of the creativity of experience, we understand as well why the creed of Bergson should have sprung from the same nation.

“La mort de quelqu’un” is a novel of departure. As the dead hero filters through the infinite conduits of existence and so disappears, it is as if Jules Romains were bidding farewell to the narration of such mere fragments of life. Henceforth he will deal with wider units. But he is not quite successful. In “Les copains,” the group-characters are heightened, the individuals are dimmer and more caught up in larger rhythms. But organization is lacking. All that is really alive is the lusty, fallow background: the long breathing of landscapes, the plethoric closeness of cafés, the avid discomfort and fertility of crowds.

It is not until his later volume, “Sur les quais de la Villette,” that Jules Romains abandons altogether the conventional and individual plot-narrative of the older novel. And it is interesting to note that, having abandoned it, he has not yet gone so far as to create its successor. The volume is not a novel at all. It is a series of recitals of which the heroes are dynamic and conflicting group-individuals. The manifest personalities of the book merely tell the story. These sketches are at once so diverse and of such parabolic line that I almost suspect M. Romains of preparing by means of them

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for the organized *magnum opus* that his method calls for. We feel the will and the ponderous yet subtle conflict behind the general mobilization which checkmated the general strike of May, 1906. We understand how the remote death of the great anarchist Ferrer seeped through the life and fired the movements of Bordeaux. The cumulations of individual resentment and resistance that flowered in the murder of an Apache in a Paris street are laid before us.

Everywhere the language of Jules Romains is complex and tortuously woven, like the life it creates. To take a phrase or a page from his pattern would be like lifting a street from his Paris or a tree from his poplar-chorded highways. In the ingredients of his style one feels the soul of his group-life; yet the weave of subtle substances, for all its plurality, remains compact and one. Of course, his stuff is the common one of novelists who have, before him, written of barracks and theaters, valleys and streets, riots and peaceful evenings. But in Jules Romains, these quantities are knit into new being: one might almost say, into primal being. It is the difference between anatomy and life. Prior to Jules Romains, these organized bodies had form, perhaps, and feature. But they lacked the substance that makes them get up and move. A greater consciousness causes these groups, forged from the new impulse of society, to catch fire, to become impregnate with it, and to give it forth.

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This same intensity of consciousness we find applied, in Dostoyefsky and Andreyev, to the individual. But here, for the first time, the social units are quickened and made luminous. And in this difference of application is revealed a difference between France and Russia. In France, the social organisms are energized to the extent where they can be shown to give forth heat—where they can live. In Russia or in America, this is not the case. But if Jules Romains is typical of the advanced culture of his particular land, he is none the less prophetic of the goal of other countries. It is a way of French art to express the present of its people, and the future of its neighbors.

III.

This, in brief, is the æsthetic and the promise of Jules Romains. How true it is, its sensitive cohesion with the accent of life today makes clear. And science and economics leave no doubt of the reality which his art is beginning to express. We are indeed in a chaotic maze of new-sprung social lives. And the tendency everywhere is for the individual consciousness to arch forth into more embracing fields. But from the more complex staves there must grow a harmony; and from the larger groups there must rise up a music.

We feel it stirring in Jules Romains. But not in him alone. Strictly comparable with his art—in its interplay of collective, energized social groups

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and in its technique of presentation—are the developments of modern painting, and of modern music.

It is impossible here to quote from his prose, since the units there are too extended; but the following examples from “*La vie unanime*” mark the new use in verse of dissonance whose analogy in music has of late been so much noticed and abused. It will be seen how even the prosody of Jules Romains bears out his preoccupation with the discords and cumulations of our social life:

Je suis une gerbe de chair veule,
Les rythmes crépitent, le temps brûle;

Pas un geste, pas une parole,
Rien qu'un tremblement de lèvres pâles.

Servir de bonde à toute la ville
Et ne pas éclater jusqu'au ciel!

These end-words bear the same relation to rhyme that a diminished ninth does to the octave. Here is another variation (note the rhyme on the penultimate and the stressing of the overtone, as in modern music) . . .

Le moteur vit d'explosions obéissantes;
Les atomes de gaz se battent en chantant;
Leurs groupes meurent et naissent. Le métal tremble.
Chaque dent des engrenages est un tremplin
D'où la force prend son élan, les jambes jointes;

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In fact, the entire use of collective groups suggests the substitution in modern music of the chord as absolute unit in place of the single note and the linear theme: or the new organizations of mass and rhythm in modern painting.

There is a meaning in these analogies. Our democracy is incomplete: machinery is our tyrant: our new-born social beings are jarring, half-isolated, hostile. Life today is full of new hot colors and new sharp discords—and the fire of impact. Jules Romains is helping to create a direct art to express it. But he has not forgotten the older, perhaps sweeter harmonies that remain. His art—unlike that of so many moderns—is not ashamed of an occasional simple interval. Even as the bases of our life are still traditional and personal, so the mold of his art is still a formal one. Therein lies not the least reason for its strength.

IV.

But the real significance of Jules Romains is not in his technique and not in his ideal: it is in the fact that he is forging the one to express the other.

The widening consciousness is, of course, not singly his. Doubtless the achieved art that must spring from it will reach far beyond him. But his place in the discovery is assured. His direct spiritual master is Romain Rolland. “Jean Christophe” contains the soul of his effort, without developing the form. In a like way, the thoughts of Jean-

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Jacques Rousseau formed the matrix of the later Romantic Movement, despite his classical manner. These planetary figures rather move the current of the arts than belong within it.

M. Romains has not published since the War. But perhaps we can find a clue to his development in a long poem which he has recently written and which is shortly to appear. It is called "L'Europe." And its very subject, coming from a soldier-Frenchman, seems to indicate a broadening of sympathy and vision. The recent work of another poet, Pierre-Jean Jouve, who is closely allied with Jules Romains, bears this out. M. Jouve has openly espoused the unpopular cause of Romain Rolland, whose quasi-exile he shares in Switzerland. It has been impossible for him to suffer for France to the exclusion of suffering as well with Germany. He has become an internationalist—a protestant against the War.

For my part, I cannot help seeing in this trend, however inadequate its present state, a token of what the new consciousness in art heralds for the new consciousness of life. The passion of endeavor is for more consciousness—and always more. The mind and soul of man are painfully, inevitably spreading forth to become the mind and soul of men.

As the unity of life comes to be revealed in its larger aspects and its greater movements, relationships that rest on the new vision must surely follow. The true knowledge of what underlies physical conflict must be the harbinger of its disappearance.

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For all life is a unit in which all parts must seek their place. In this dawn of mankind, we are still groping for ourselves, we are still groping for our place. We are unorganized and without comfort. And we are bruised, like creatures feeling in the dark. Even, we lack confidence that the place we seek is really there. For only such kindred sharers of life who fail to know themselves can strive to destroy each other.

POSTSCRIPT

The inadequacy of this essay to the subject is not absolved by the fact that it was the first to appear in America. I concur in all that is here written. But the art of Romans is a stratification. One may cut through many layers, and yet not have reached bottom.

Romans belongs to a tradition of French art misprized among us. Roughly, there have been two major strains, sometimes separate, sometimes merged. The rationalistic strain, including Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire, Stendhal, Gourmont, France, is the best understood in English speaking countries perhaps because, as Anatole France put it, "a book to reach posterity should travel light." In this traditional current are also the contemporary clever and disillusioned works from which the ignorant have once more so glibly deduced the well-advertised French Decadence. There is a lineage

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of masters in whom the rationalistic wars with the mystical. Such were Rabelais and Abelard. Such are Renan and his great successor, André Gide. But the pure mystical tradition has flowed on, although always so solidly fleshed that to the Germanic mind (to whom the mystical means clouds) it was at times invisible. Among its masters were Villon, Racine, Pascal, Poussin, Balzac, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Cézanne and now Romains. It is the child of the Gothic . . an ars francorum . .

Romains is a mystic. Like Cézanne and like Goethe, he is a follower perhaps unconscious, of Spinoza. By which I mean in brief that his materials, his characters, the emotions of his characters, are essentially treated as attributes of the Divine, as modifications containing the substance and partaking of the dynamic of the Absolute.

7: *Literature in the Unmaking*

THERE is about certain persons a deadening atmosphere. It may be hard to localize. They may act and look and talk like creatures of sound substance. But one goes away from them diminished, heart-sick, thirsty for clear air and the sun as if one had been dreaming in a charnel-house. There are, moreover, books of the same sort. And "Literature in the Making" by Joyce Kilmer is one of them. It is hard to believe that merely the dominant note of ineptitude which pervades most of this book's chapters could have brought about the sense of sacrilege and death that it exudes. Silliness is rather a part of life than of death. And ignorance may go with youth. The book is a series of literary interviews:—but Robert W. Chambers' discoursing on "Genius," Kathleen Norris saying of Dickens, "I think I like him chiefly because he saw so clearly the joys of the poor," and Rex Beach proving how the motion-picture is cleaning up the novel should properly furnish pleasant reading. A series of conversations with writers so various as Booth Tarkington, George Barr McCutcheon, Charles Rann Kennedy, E. A. Robinson and Amy

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Lowell might well prove an indigestible *satura*; but there should be nothing ghoulish about it. And not even the fact that the interviews were garnered from the Sunday Supplement of the *New York Times* can explain our feeling. Logically one is forced to the conclusion that something in Joyce Kilmer's treatment of these subjects must be responsible for the pervasion of decrepitude and despair that the book brings. This is undoubtedly the case. There is nothing sinister in what Mr. Chambers says of the speed limitations of Flaubert; but there is something decidedly sinister in the spectacle of a critic seriously noting it. Arthur Guiterman's advice to poets is merely fatuous,—but Mr. Kilmer's authoritative report of it is terrifying. The wisdom of George Barr McCutcheon applied to fiction and magazines might have its place in any verbal circus; but a chapter devoted to it—in a book called "Literature in the Making—By Some of its Makers"—suggests a nightmarish perversion of the eternal verities. And the pursuance of one tone of voice on the part of the chronicler from Harry Leon Wilson to E. A. Robinson and from Fannie Hurst to Amy Lowell offers a picture of critical obtuseness which becomes sardonic indeed when one considers that it has been exhibited in authoritative places and published forth to the world by a reputable journal and a reputable house. Herein lies the vice of this book: that it was written seriously, printed seriously and doubtless is seriously read. This equation of reality sets in a different light the

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complacent follies which otherwise we might have laughed at. For at once, the condition underlying the spectacle is clear—a widespread and American condition—the condition of a people with no sense of values and without reverence for the truth that lies in art. In any less supine society, would not Mr. Joyce Kilmer be laughed into the limbo where his dogmatic ignorance consigns him?

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*Why do I preserve this unkindness upon the memory of a late soldier and poet? Why do I not let his ashes rest, like his poetry, in peace? Because as I reread these pages I observed that I was attacking a *fætus* that has since grown up into the Colylum. There were Columns in those days, also: but they were unassertive and anodyne-like jesters at the Court of a Great King. The August Presence, of course, was American Materialism. The jester could go "just so far" . . like any feudal clown . . so long as the Monarch was powerful and hale. These latter days, however, the Monarch has been distracted, nervous, worried. The Jester has grown solemn, arrogant, pretentious. He has displayed the servility of the jester's soul. His function was merely to amuse: now it is to condone and to ease. When the Devil is sick, we are told, the Devil a monk would be. When the complacent bourgeoisie loses its primitive health, it desires to grow cultured. The Jester turns dramatic and lit-*

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erary critic. And he sets to work cheapening literature in such a way that the August Reader will not be ill-at-ease before a subject which his “culture” tells him he dare not ignore. The Court feels it must notice books. But it does not wish to be displaced by them from its own shallow world. The Colylumist conveniently and adroitly lowers book and play. Moreover, outside the Court live the herds of social slaves. They hearken to the Colylumist for sycophantic reasons: hearing the words meant for the King, they imagine themselves in the August Presence.

I offer this apology to Mr. Kilmer. He was the ill-starred unconscious forebear of an ugly brood. He hired out his mind for money, doubtless because it was the one way for him to earn bread for his poetic dreams. Such is the irony of life: the evil seed he helped to sow has enormously increased; and his poet's dream is as wistfully lone as ever.

8: *Playing a Joke on Broadway*

To uplift the theater is like pulling a tree from its roots. It is one thing that cannot do it any good. But so long as the drama resists the lofty effort—an effort that is virtually the will to cleanse it of the earth—there is still hope. Perhaps at last the searching talents that these endeavors still absorb will return to the theatrical reality that needs them. And perhaps then a true theater will grow up. For roots must go down into soil before flowers can push into the sun. This is a rule drama-culturists will evidently learn only through a series of disgusts. But meantime a cheering sign of our theater is the failure of the reformers to uplift it.

All these conclusions are brought home, once more, by Mrs. Hapgood's production of John Galsworthy's "The Little Man" and G. K. Chesterton's "Magic." Once again, it becomes evident how the upward-looking of these friends of our drama means largely a dim but obsequious eye on London. There were good things in these productions. Rollo Peters' impression of a railway carriage in the former play was a chaste bit of scenic economy. The ragged, naturalistic acting, it is true, was all out of measure with the note the scenery struck—that of a strictly formal interpre-

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tation. But the chief point was the comparative unnecessary of bringing out "The Little Man" at all. And then, "Magic." Of course, the English did not take Chesterton seriously as a playwright. Chesterton is an amiable as well as ample member of their family. If he wants to have fun, London is delighted to have fun with him. His play was a cozy theatrical bit of gossip, done by a clever son for a mother's birthday party. The party naturally took place before the War: everyone was in good humor, and everyone caught the jocose spirit of the game. But who would transplant this peaceful, this familial, this colloquial affair, made for an hour by the hearthside—transplant it to Broadway, in wartime, with fan-fare and heralding—who else but an American theater-preacher!

There is a certain modesty discernible in the choice by Mrs. Hapgood of these weak and insignificant plays. It is as if our new producer wished to stress her small beginnings. But, of course, the corollary of such diffidence must be a proportionate achievement. Unluckily the productions were not of a sort to send Mr. Belasco to despair or the Shuberts into retirement. The plays went rather badly. They proved uninteresting, at least to that fraction of our public who do not take their drama as a child takes candy. There were excellent artists in the cast but they were never at their best. Actors need a common spirit to inspire them, to exalt their declamation to creation. Their work depends on the power of their theater; must rise

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from the impulse of their coming together. If Frank Conroy and O. P. Heggie and Cathleen Nesbitt went about on that evening diminished, it was probably because this impulse and this power were wanting. If the plays touched no springs that could possibly have transfigured them from the stylish confectionary that they were, so did the productions miss all that contact with the audience, that real sense of group expression which underlie the dramatic and histrionic arts.

What mouse, then, did this aspiring hillock of ideals labor with, and bring forth? In what way was New York conjured and hammered into a sense of sanctity by this mediocre rendition of two mediocre plays? It may be objected that I attach an importance to these productions which their protagonists would be the first to disclaim. If they do disclaim it, I gainsay them. The importance is there.

It is important that Mrs. Hapgood's presentations were no better—were in some ways worse—than many by her much-attacked, much-patronized neighbors on Broadway. And it is important that as entertainment or as a sheer piece of competent craft exploiting with economy a given amount of talent, this contribution of Mrs. Hapgood to the American stage could not compare with half-a-dozen unregenerate Broadway comedies.

And all this is important because it gives us at least a comparative respect for the commercial drama. Productions aimed nakedly to make money

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strike nearer a racial and fundamental source, catch up a more real fire of community life, than the fine spinning of the intellectual reformers. But unquestionably these latter persons are competent to help. Their clean spirit and their aspiring taste are sorely needed. If only they would learn the need of roots —the need of starting from some level common to the theater before they can hope to build up a structure that the least braw breath of wind will not cause to topple over!

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Here, just for a change, I can be optimistic. The drama-culturists seem to have gone and may it be forever. Since I wrote, such simple and fundamental artists as Chaplin, Brice, Jolson, Fields, Whiteman, Savoy, with a host of other gorgeous jazzers and apocalyptic dancers have come into their own: shamelessly they hold the stage and win the plaudits which went once to the dim drama of discussion. They have even found their Critic in Mr. Gilbert Seldes.

This is all to the good for of such folk-stuffs shall be built our indigenous theater. There are other encouraging signs. The alliance of men like Robert Edmond Jones, Eugene O'Neill, Lee Simonson, Kenneth Macgowan with the practical dramatic world is among them. As also the ascendancy of Fannie Brice over Mrs. Fiske, and of Al Jolson over Mr. Sothern. . .

9: *Valedictory to a Theatrical Season*

AT a time when the hope of future health and life seems to be the sole survivor from the bankruptcy of the present, one may be expected to carry a searching attitude even into the theater. For the stage is a mighty mirror in which the audience stands forth, sharply and faithfully reflected. The audience is a vague and shifting creature. But the mirror is magic. It draws out characteristic line and essence; it gives an image that may be understood. And even the audience somehow knows this, since it has come into existence chiefly through the curiosity to see itself.

This dweller in the theater explains our peculiar interest in it at such times as these: but it explains as well the conservatism of the dramatic art. You cannot expect a people to change greatly from one season to the next. You cannot expect an art whose prime ingredient is the whole human family to perform nimble somersaults like an individual. Changes in the theater are likely to be slow and ponderous and painful. But they are none the less true and fundamental. And the image in the mirror, despite its economy of line and space, lays

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bare those subtle divergences of form which herald the coming of the new.

The usual features of the American Show have of course not been absent, this last season. But they may safely be assumed and put aside. They are the old relatives—the suffered elders of a passing generation—who knit harmlessly by the hearth while the world jogs past them. They have many names—hallowed names: the old-fashioned melodrama, the old-fashioned comedy-with-music, the Victorian plot-play in new-fangled dress sacred to the memory of men like Charles Klein, George Broadhurst and Augustus Thomas. In their true form, they are good, proper, senile members of a group that is perhaps rightly fond of them. And for the critic to judge them harshly is simply to be inhumane.

Their decrepitude, however, has become obvious in the frantic disguises that accompany their appearance. They no longer satisfy, and they must soon be gone. If a new breed of vital, blustering plays is indeed crowding upwards to replace them, we have no reason for concern. Our interest should therefore rightly be directed to whatever variants and changes we can find today in the American show. However vaguely, they tell the tale of what is coming next.

What, then, is emerging from our doddering dramatic past? In what transfigured form is the conflict of our life rising on the popular and native scene? Love, ambition, faith and sacrifice—all the

true coinage of the theater—must surely be in process of reminting to meet the reality of the millions who, when they are not at the American show, are helping to build the American nation.

Plenty of such evolving signs do indeed exist. Let us have a look at them, as they appeared in the past season. . .

The musical play is the plutocrat of our stage. It is, if anything, rather too nakedly devoted to the fantasies of love. Its burstings of song, its assorted and sentimental capers are all, in the last analysis, gay documents of this emotion. It is therefore significant to note that in the latest tune-comedies of Broadway the straightforward love-motif is dwindling; and that when it does appear, it seems somehow to have done so only after a struggle that tortured its forms and warped its directions into strange by-ways. Ugly and unnatural unions, the exchange of the traditional attributes of each sex to the other and the use of clown brutality with clear erotic sources are among our recent contributions to the theme of love. New types of characters are springing up to represent these contributions. Huge and aggressive women-clowns trumpet about with violent intent on the pretty-boy heroes of the cast. And these heroes display an up-to-date reluctance to making love. Their favorite posture is that of the pursued. The new heroines have a liking for the fat, brute comedians who smirk over their advances and then knock them down. And only when the dainty

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hero, escaping the seduction of the powerful clown-woman, is at last inspired to beat the heroine, does he convince and win her. Some acute vagary of popular demand is supplying a bumper crop of women with the physical appeal of boys, and of men who act like women. On all sides, the theme of love emerges as if from some impalpable barrier whose repressive power twists it into abnormal guises. In one musical play, this inhibiting force makes its appearance openly in the plot: there is the usual repulsive and disappointed woman-clown—an aunt, this time—and a young couple forbidden by the contract of their marriage from kissing and holding hands. Perhaps a hint of our future there stood prettily dramatized before us.

This curious deformity is not absent in the "movies." Charles Chaplin is an extremely brilliant clown, but he is also an unhealthy one. I recall one film of his in which a series of flirtations turned with invariable emphasis into a physical encounter, a physical upset and a drubbing of the female. The clown-trade has always honored the fisticuff and the blow. But in its contemporary mood, these blows are with sinister frequency directed against women. The modern caper is for the comedian to lunge for the man, who dodges, and so fell the lady. Indeed, violence to women and violence by women are among the spreading laugh-winners of the new American show. The beset, effeminate manling of the musical stage makes his reappearance, a bit galvanized and consider-

ably funnier, as the most popular figure of the screen. And more and more, the fun-provoking tricks of our plays have come to be based on deformities of the impulse and the human rôle which, in the past, were protected—rather than attacked—by the comic genius.

Classic comedy employed the deformative technique to a deliberate social end. "Harpagon" and "Tartuffe" were its typical victims. Personalities that in themselves presented deformities of impulse became the creatures of grotesque. The healthy social will played the avenger. So we found laughter directed against the miser and the hypocrite, the tyrant father and the stupid husband. Today, we find it shafted against the lover, the man and the woman. There were old taboos against crabbed parents, false priests, unsocial plutocrats. If the psychology of caricature is indeed criticism, there seem to be new taboos against healthy men and healthy women. A fine respect for untrammeled love and for the impertinences of youth molded the comedy of Terence, of Molière and Marivaux, of Congreve and Bernard Shaw. Can it be that some subtle resistance to these same blossomings of life qualifies the comedy of today? The puny cavaliers, the fool-ministers, the astringent heroines and the raping duennas that cavort increasingly in our musical and "movie" farces would suggest something of the sort.

Of course, the chief companion of the farce in the American show is the play of thrills—the

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melodrama. So close do these two forms run together that they are often merged into a unit—the new dramatic cocktail of which “Seven Keys to Baldpate” was an eminent and perhaps classical example. Between these blatant and unregenerate extremes, we leave no room for the subtler growths. The American show is indifferent alike to that refining of laughter into smile which makes for comedy, and to the elevation of shock into impression which denotes tragedy. But if the melo is generically old, our contemporary masters have managed to reflect within it, as in the farce, the gradual evolving of something new. We have seen how in our so-called comedies a set of acidulous and denatured substitutes is being brewed in place of the no longer filling love-theme. We may observe as well how in the so-called “drama,” the traditional labels of nobility, sacrifice, duty and passion are put to situations so hideously false that one salty touch of irony would alone be needed to make them Swiftian satire.

Let us analyze a typical example—taken from the films: We find a father zealous for his “family honor” and two sons. The married son falls in love with an actress. His father turns him out for his faithless crime. The unmarried son, who is the hero, goes to the actress to bully her into loosing her hold. He falls in love with her, himself. Since he is the hero, however, she is forthwith transmogrified from villainess to heroine. In order to cure the other married brother of his unhappy

love, she—with bleeding heart—plays the drunkard and the flirt at a dinner to which she has taken him for this simple purpose. The fallen young man, in consequence of this act of heroism, robs his father's safe and loses the money at cards. The cad who wins the money breaks into the actress' home and tries to buy her with his spoil. The hero emerges from a canopy, throws out the cad, first pocketing the ill-gotten money. Meantime, the father discovers the theft, goes to the wicked son, places a pistol in his hand and tries to make him shoot himself for the family honor. After a harrowing struggle, with the father's hand clenched over his son's, and the pistol at the latter's throat, the hero, his actress-love and the other's wife break through the door. The hero advances to the battling pair and says: "I stole the money" and pulls the wad of bills from his pocket. The thief-son, fully satisfied, falls into his father's arms, forgiven: is gathered up by his neglected wife, forgiven again: and the actress is straightway added to the family honor as a new daughter-in-law. . .

Now, in this drama, which doubtless reads like a burlesque, there are many of the old clear-labeled properties of the theater: among them, family honor, love, self-sacrifice by the hero, self-humiliation by the heroine in feigning wickedness, repentance, reconciliation, and the Cornelian immolation of the sinful son by the stoic father. But to confound these situations with their authen-

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tic namesakes in "Horace," "La Dame aux Camélias," "David Garrick," etc., is to misprize them. They are decompositions of old material: and it is precisely for this reason that we can find in them the germs of something new—the elements of change that have brought about disintegration.

We may not enjoy the old melodrama. We may not believe in right and wrong and duty as the hero bandies the terms about. But it is plain that the old audiences did. Their attitude was the major premise: and resting on it, the inner structure of the play had a true, artistic logic. The very fact that the people were in earnest imposed upon the playwright the need of making his drama somewhat water-tight, somewhat conclusive. He had the conviction of his hearers to reckon with, and any too gross perversion of reality, in casting doubt upon the subject of their conviction, would have rebounded on himself. A too unlikely play about "chastity," for instance, must immediately have slurred the concept of chastity itself, as the play limned it forth, and so have become intolerable to the crowds. Their staunch belief compelled the favor-seeking dramatist to construct a dramatic likeness for his story; and from this, in turn, the belief of the audience stood forth reflected. It is plain, however, that in a concoction like the one described, no such logic exists. The hero who steps up with "I stole the money" is not incurring, even for the moment, the mental and physical consequences of his act. He is therefore not sacrificing

himself. His self-accusation brings on none of the reactions, subjective or environmental, that go toward even the most naïve illusion. The behavior of the guilty brother, who by virtue of this isolated lie falls into his father's loving arms, lacks all relativity with what surrounds it. Indeed, each one of these situations is in a vacuum, is denuded of any of the circumstances of the real, is a label on an empty bottle. Taking them together, one finds that there is psychic divorce between them and that the emotions nominally evoked lack any integration with the actions nominally pictured. They are indeed joined together by no power more subtle or more true than the camera itself.

The influence of the camera-art has been to speed this disintegrating process. The two-dimensional scene runs one into the next with far greater fluency, far less resistance than was possible with the three-dimensional structure of the stage. All of the tricks of the "movies" encourage the false dramatic logic which we have considered. Its freedom of shifting scenes and character-perspectives: its power of imposing one independent picture upon the other: its license of time and place and its illusory triumphs over nature, play their part. But a mechanical means could do no more than foster an integral condition. The deterioration of the art was there. Had it not been the present status of the "movie" would have proved intolerable, and a popular industry must have developed otherwise. Screen technique simply took advantage of a latent

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tendency and, with its greater power to fulfill it, gained the prestige that today makes the motion-picture our most satisfying, most gripping and most expressive art. The same extremes of mock feeling and mock action run through the whole welter of our plays. They are exaggerated on the screen, but they are not wanting in the farces, the comedies and the farce-dramas. Everywhere in our theater, there is this growing rigmarole of unreal and unrelated action. One is therefore driven to conclude that behind must be a like mass of unreal emotion. For any feeling that exists basally, if only in the tradition of a crowd, will flower in action—and in action that is emotionally determined. These current adulterations of love, virtue, honor, are bearable to the onlooker only on the theory that he no longer fundamentally believes in them. If he did, such parodies of his belief would turn his stomach and inspire his wrath. But the contemporary spectacle touches alone the periphery of consciousness and to this surface the true impulses of life have somehow been unable to attain.

For a reason, then, the normal interplay of men and women, in so far as it is imaged in the American show, seems to be tortured and ill-at-ease and dwindling. And the reason is not far to seek, in our contemporary American life. The canons of art, as well as the canons of right and wrong which we brought with us from abroad, are alien and inadequate in our new complex world. They have

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power merely to obstruct its birth. America is trying to grow up through a dump-heap of discarded customs and ideas. And the maladies of its discomfort crop out in thwarted and perverted forms. The expressions of the old no longer satisfy but the nay-saying forces behind them can blight each fresh sprout of growth as it appears. The new fate of the love-theme is a case in point. The Puritan taboos are heavy on us; but the need is strong for freer imagery than the magistrates allow. America, thank God! has none of the domestic adaptability of the Anglo-Saxon to his own commandments. So the love-theme breaks its barrier in perverted forms; and the neurotic, auto-erotic "show" is the result. The credentialed beliefs in what is virtue no longer fit the free confusion of our lives. But they are still traditionally in force, and any effort to replace them is still cried-out upon by the proper forums of the nation. The dramatic parodies we have examined rise from our suppressed indifference—an indifference which most of us would of course deny and which is evident only in such deflected acts as these.

Everywhere the bars are clamped against the dawning drama of populous America. The need of vicarious experience bursts forth in disguised versions of our present life; or else it is driven back into innocuous and romantic pasts. Perhaps the truest contributions of the motion-picture are these simple epics of the American fable. Pioneer California, Alaska and the Civil War become pas-

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tures for our hunger. Several splendid expressions have sprung from this one unhindered field. Of course, the folk-epic belongs to the childhood of a nation. When vision faces forward, when analysis and the stern grappling with the future become the business of dreams, the epic falls away. Its fabular simplicity no longer holds; its past paradise is pale before the adventure to come. But our spirit may not encounter its present and its future. Its healthiest dramatic course is therefore *backward*. Film-plays like "The Birth of a Nation," "The Barrier," "A Romance of the Redwoods," are true epics, rich in primitive sincerity and full of the fervor of the folk-dream. They belong to an epoch in the American drama in which the repressive forces of a transplanted culture drove the popular imagination back to the more obvious borders and the more easy conquests.

The spectacle that recently gripped the multitudes at the Uptown Tabernacle of Mr. Billy Sunday belongs generally to the American show and specifically to the past theatrical season. It would be worth while to trace the analogues of method between Mr. Sunday's sermons and the musical comedy: to show how in each, song and dance and clownery are strung along an extraneous and irrational theme. There is no room, here, for such details. But it must be plain that no people emotionally anchored to the sources of their life, and on good terms with the impulses which must shape its future, would tolerate this man's adulterated

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wares. If we study Billy Sunday—study his ideas, his gestures, his illustrations—we will find that they are composed of substitutes for forbidden fruit quite like the substitutes that in the theater pass for the human emotions.

It might surprise even so hardened a sinner as Mr. Sunday to learn that when, in “ripping the dance from hell to breakfast” he springs from floor to ceiling, he is releasing in a distorted symbol precisely the energy that the dance smoothly and harmoniously clothes: and that his audience are enjoying his graphic condemnation of the dance with the same senses, however twisted, that make them enjoy dancing on the stage. When Mr. Sunday curses the drinker, he is furnishing in his excess verbiage a substitute for the excess of alcohol. When he loses his temper with Satan, he is venting the bile, the anger, the ugly passion that Satan typifies. And when he howls at his hearers to stop frequenting the brothel and the saloon, he gives them, in his brutal illustrations, an at least temporary satisfaction in place of the vices he decries.

The success of Billy Sunday is due to his use of what, in pathology, is known as the conversion-mechanism:—the channeling of an instinctive desire away from an expression that is forbidden to one that is disguised and not forbidden. It is unsafe to give open leash to sexuality, so turn the passion into the fear of Hell and glut your worry by “hitting the trail.” It is uneconomic to get drunk on alcohol, so wave a flag and get drunk on God. It

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may be natural to lose your temper with your brother, but it is less dangerous to get mad at the devil. Such is his method. And one need only remark the constantly recurring wreath of smile on the terrier-like countenance of Mr. Sunday to realize what good fun it is to have his sort of "religion" in a materialistic and fun-denying world. The neurotic satisfies himself with a set of distorted symptoms in place of an unfriendly and hard reality. So Mr. Sunday's preachments. They are, like the other shows we have considered, full of blandishing and adulterated goods fashioned to take the place of forbidden life. Their source, as well, is the denial of life and the mistrusting of experience. In place of the dance, contortion: in place of pleasure, the frenzy of the dervish: in place of adventure, the back-trail down to childhood: in place of revolt, profanity: in place of God, an old exhorter with a whip: in place of life, a dark cell with a barred window.

In this way does the American show neglect the possible glad future of American life. It would be well for our intellectual and social pontiffs to know their part in it. Nor must the established churches and the gentle churchmen who brought Mr. Sunday to New York with a suffering sense of being practical, escape the ironic justice of their act. This jaundiced dullard is the logical outcome of their own growth-denying methods.

The strategic positions are all with the moribund attitude toward life. School and university,

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magazine and journal, church and government are the thrones of the obsolescent and about-to-be-discarded. No peaceful means of change seems to exist between the last transplanted European generation and the first fledglings of a new America. The insurgency still foams at the feet of the world. So, although their sun is setting, the debilitated forces can still dictate terms and canons of forbiddance. They can keep the untrained and unorganized stirrings of youthful America from a conscious right-of-way into knowledge and expression. They can still send a reluctant people into fratricidal war with the false persuasion of their "laws," their "duty" and their "patriotism."

This is the climax of their sinister power. But their peace also has its atrocities. And among them is this spectacle of an uneasy populace, yearning for what is denied it and turning to poisoned substitutes for art. The historian will not have to look to the recent acts of Congress to understand the present danger of America. He will find no clearer picture of our condition than within the mirror of the stage. For there, we are revealed as a vast creature uttering platitudes when unperturbed, and going off into stammerings and tics when something deep in us seeks utterance.

The elders block the way to growth and to expression. They do this not because they are vicious or stronger, but because they happened to be there first—and are entrenched. They must be thrust aside. Their rules are of course designed for their

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own preservation. And the method of their instinctive fight is to deny liberty of feeling and the resources of life to the rising multitude whose ascendency means their death.

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The injustice which this essay does to Mr. Chaplin by a total disregard for the pure æsthetic virtue of his art I have righted in "Our America" and elsewhere. Mr. Chaplin is far from unhealthy. His art indeed is a symbol of health in a complexly morbid world.

Moreover, while I have dwelt on the license to poor work which the technical freedom of the films has brought to shallow men, I might well have made some mention of the opportunity to invent new forms which this same freedom will suggest to the creator who may yet find his place in Hollywood. The logical transcendence of the film from our casual laws of sequence, cause and effect and physical formation should one day be exploited by the poet toward a transcendently visionary art—an art of free forms and pure designs—an art related to that of a Blake and a Picasso. Before this can be, however, there must come enough specialization to permit of the production of films for "minorities only": the entire million-dollar basis of the industry, resting as it does upon the suffrage of one hundred million morons, must be altered.

This whole essay indeed suffers through excess

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geneticism. The entire problem of the spiritual value . . the spiritual mechanics . . of what is known as abnormality and neurosis, is far profounder and more inscrutable than the psychoanalysts imagine. For psychoanalysis is a brilliant pragmatic technic largely in the hands of philosophically shallow men. I have no quarrel with its superb function in the domains of research or therapeutics. The critic of art and history, however, who permits his synthesis to be determined by any psychological technic whatever is like the painter who permits his picture to be composed by his brushes and his inch-rule. In æsthetic criticism as in all æsthetic activity, the psychological is a means. The control of spiritual vision by any somatic measure is a perversion: a perversion of which I can speak with zest since I have been guilty of it more than once. . . But here, too, is a subject too vast and deep to take on, now.

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10: *The Art of the Vieux Colombier*

WE have a way, at best, in this country, of not bothering about beginnings. It has been a natural frame of mind in a land of pioneers where everything dates from yesterday, and where the gap between the present and the past is usually so vast as not to be worth the practical price of bridging. But in matters of art, such an attitude is bad, if for no other reason because it means a limiting of pleasure.

When the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier came to New York in 1917, it aroused much intelligent interest. Aspects of its work were pretty thoroughly explored. But the nature of its background in France, of what it had done and been before it dropped in among us, remained largely unconsidered. We were applying to our French visitors the polite custom of the country: taking them in, and asking no questions. But in this particular case, both our new friends and ourselves would have gained by a more delving curiosity.

For the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier was more than a company of clever actors under the direction of a clever man, come here to present French plays to a polite audience that could no longer go to Paris. It was more than a company under man-

date of the government of France to make America aware of the more peaceful glories of her Ally. The Théâtre du Vieux Colombier was indeed more than a theater. It was the expression of a great and organic life in the world of France, and in the world of Europe: the symbol of a group whose spirit is the voice of a new generation. And its presence among us gave America her first chance to examine at home one of those compact and urgent movements which, through the centuries, have made the French the true protagonists of modern culture.

Knowing nothing of its story, we might have gone to the Vieux Colombier and enjoyed our evening: and taken home with us a vague sense of health and cleanliness against our next encounter with the commercial stage. But with that sense of background which gives perspective and dimension to what one sees, we might have had far more of our experience. We might have realized more keenly our close contact, watching these players, with the spirit and history of France.

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In telling the story of a particular movement in French art, it is hard to know where to begin. It is hard, even if, as in this case, the movement is very young, and clearly revolutionary, and is knit with the career of a single man. For there is no isolation in the affairs of French culture: there is no beginning. Even the case of a young artist rebelling against all accepted institutions and at

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length setting up an institution of his own does not simplify the task of making a clear picture. For the tradition of French art is revolution: the true conservative of French art is he who rebels. The unbroken succession of French men of genius is simply the long line of men who break with their surroundings. Like as not it may be seen, when the rebel's fight is won and his standard high, that what he has set up is precisely the spirit of that French tradition against which he thought he was engaged, and in whose defense his enemies believed themselves inspired to act. France, moreover, is a compact organism, a complex but integrated unit. Wherever one touches her, one is in contact with her entire life. But France is more: she is the center of a group of other units—other cultures, other peoples. So that touching France, we are at once in contact as well with Europe. All of this complicates the effort of understanding a French work of art or a French artistic movement. If one knows Europe, the artist's product is like a window—colored of course by the individual vision—through which one may observe an entire people. But if France is unknown, any comprehension of her art is at once radically limited: the window is shut: the vision of the artist becomes a colored glass, lovely perhaps, but through which little can be seen.

All of these considerations are in my mind, as I face the task of telling the story of the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. Behind the theater, which

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was actually founded in 1913, lies a land of literary endeavor caught since 1909 in the survey of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*: lies also the entire field of dramatic and theatrical affairs, in France and Western Europe, without the basis of which the Vieux Colombier sinks below the true measure of its significance.

But more particularly, at the head of these several avenues of experimental and critical creation, there are the men themselves: growing up in France, taking their sustenance from the soil of their land and from the air of the world about them; unconsciously absorbing their own past, rising to their own present, determining their future. And this, from the standpoint of our history, is fortunate. It simplifies the problem. For after all, the life of an artistic movement is not deeply different from any other organic growth. And its way of life may perhaps best be known by watching its increase: by the recording of its experience before the elements it absorbed.

Of this one may be sure: no artistic movement that actually lives is primarily an intellectual affair. The infant does not posit the conditions of life, resolve them and so determine to mature. Nor does a true movement synthetize the state of an art, its needs and defects, and thence its own departure. It expands emotionally. It has the emotional need of breathing, so it breathes in fresh air; it has the emotional impulse of hunger and thirst, so it drinks in fresh life; it has the organic

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restlessness of youth, so it moves about, and it hews about. And at last when it is grown to its own life, it may be able to determine what elements went to make it up.

The distinctive flaw in most of the so-called artistic movements of our time—perhaps of all the forgotten movements, the nugatory movements of all times—is precisely their synthetic character. They were blocked together deliberately, intellectually, by some handful of youths too immersed in the chemistry of art. In consequence, when they are once in order, somehow these movements do not move: they do not shine with the luminosity of life: they fall apart at the first shock of the sun. The distinctive quality of the *Vieux Colombier*, and of the group which it expresses lies precisely in its emotional and unconscious—its *organic* coming into being.

Copeau's home was in the Ile-de-France. His father belonged to the artisan class, his mother to the bourgeoisie of the provincial town. Copeau was interested in books and plays: his parents did not hinder his going to a lycée in Paris and then to the Sorbonne. The Paris, which, like every French lad, he had come to conquer, was ringing with the silver bells of the Symbolist poets, was beating with the hammer strokes on copper of the schoolmen of Flaubert. In 1887, André Antoine, in true French fashion, had declared war on the entire pantheon of Parnassus: he had set up his Théâtre Libre in the Naturalistic flats. But it

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was already plain that in his desire to stabilize the Parisian theater in his own image he had failed. Still, Paris had not forgotten the fresh virulence of his first years. His open-hearted love of tumult, his revolt against the priesthood of the silver bells and the well-beaten copper tablets was vibrant in the air: it was bound to bring response from all of those young energies at large which had evaded the nets of the reigning schools. Each succeeding epoch has its haven of revolt against the crowned rebels of the epoch before. The Théâtre Libre still played this rôle: doubtless it played it with Copeau.

But the strength he found in it went merely toward his own potential self-assertion. It did not satisfy him: it sent him hunting. All that the young man knew was this: that the drama of the Boulevards left him cold with disgust. He had the desire to be an actor: looking at the stage he put the desire away. But if on the one hand the commercial drama froze him, on the other the new aristocracies of letters left him unwarmed. Even the new twilight of Maeterlinck impressed him less by its iridescence than its dampness. Copeau sought reality. In him was stirring an era of spiritual strength whose prime labor was to be the rescue of reality from the disorder and shrinkage of an industrial world: from a world turned middle-class. Looking about him at the schools, Copeau found that their chief business seemed to be either to escape from reality altogether, or to assist In-

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dustrialism's will to shrink it to a snug material consistency. He admired the discipline and the perfection of the Symbolists; but he recognized upon what vast exclusions of experience their perfection rested. He admired the true men among the Naturalists, but they also failed to give him satisfaction. For if the Symbolists denied the objectivity of life, these others had no place for the world's spiritual content. They did not, before Industrialism's challenge, withdraw into themselves; but they did arrange their vision of the world according to its aggressive purposes. Neither group mastered a rounded reality. And in Copeau was already the need of restoring that very balance of artistic vision which was absent temporarily from Western Europe. He loved Rimbaud and Verlaine, Flaubert and Henri Bécque. But he could not follow their followers. In the turmoil of literary faiths and factions, he remained a distracted and inconspicuous figure.

He went abroad. He spent a year in Denmark where he married. And then, for two years, he acted as the superintendent of a factory bequeathed him in unwieldy form by his family in the Ardennes. He wrote little articles which appeared in little magazines. He had not found himself. And Paris had not found him. But he returned in 1905. Gradually his articles increased in number and in weight. He made friends among the younger men of letters with whom, but a few years later, he was to close and to surge forward into a place of power.

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Still, he was in reality outside this world which he surveyed with indecision. He earned a precarious living. For a time, he arranged exhibitions for a dealer in pictures. And then, in 1907, Jacques Rouché, editor of the *Grande Revue*, made him dramatic critic of his magazine, and the true work of Jacques Copeau began.

At this time, Copeau was twenty-eight years old. Already, the established schools of French expression were dissolved and swept away. The Naturalists were dead. Even Bourget and Barrès and Anatole France who were supposed to have helped kill them were tottering on the brink of their decadence. Maeterlinck was full-blown like a flower whose petals prepare to fall. He had lost his magic in heavy tragedy and the lightly occult. The eyes of France were once more wistful and undirected. But already, in sharp, uncoördinated accents, a new voice was lifting. Verhaeren was searing the post-parnassian poets with the scorch of his flame; Charles-Louis Philippe had written much of his luminous, poignant prose; André Gide was in full protean maturity; and Paul Claudel was at work on his Gothic dramas. These men were older than Copeau. They knew him and loved him. But it is doubtful if any of them knew—with the exception possibly of Gide—that this man was to take a place of power among them, was to help make them into an army, and to march with them across the barriers that always lie between the writers of a new expression and the pub-

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lic consciousness which they express. He was merely the new dramatic critic of a not too significant revue.

It is interesting in the light of today to read these criticisms of Jacques Copeau. They have all the simplicity, and violence, of prophecy. There moves in them a dynamic might which, it must have been obvious at once, could not be long contained within the merely critical field. At this time, it is almost inevitable to compare them with a sharp artillery barrage: one foresees the advance of the fresh army.

In all of modern dramatic criticisms I know of no work more salient, more honest and irresistible, than these papers which Copeau flung against the contemporary Parisian theater. One thinks at once of the early fulminations of Bernard Shaw. Shaw too was preparing for a new drama. He saw in the puppetries and carpentries of London so much mere obstruction to the drama which he dreamed soon to have marching forward. In Shaw was the same nausea for a *fin-de-siècle* stage: for its romantic mummies propped like forgotten bundles behind the footlights: for its dead gentlemen and ladies who had been wound up in the era before, when Adam was still the first man and woman conformed psychologically to the Civil Code. Shaw, too, refused to make believe that he was dazzled or warmed by fireworks that had blazed three decades ago into such fiery designs as a-man-and-two-women or a-woman-and-two-men, and which now

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were scraps of charred wood in the wings. But there were integral distinctions in the approach of these two potential dramatic leaders. Shaw, to begin with, had a program, a personal program, with which he was satisfied and of which he was fully, cannily conscious. His program was Shaw—and possibly Wagner and Ibsen for good measure. His direction was plotted out. And to oppose it, there was merely the extreme depletion of a depleted century of the English theater. His enemies were limited. But chiefly, his program was limited as well. He represented no irresistible mute Group, stirring for the light. He represented Shaw. And one feels in his critiques the sensitive reaction of an uneasy and invading person who is worried about a place for himself. Nowhere, either in his essays or in his subsequent plays, moves that vast organic swell of rhythmic energy which heralds the rise of an art. A clever man, essentially the propagandist, the non-conformist preacher, announces himself in that best of ways: the denouncing of his predecessors. And that is all.

In the essays of Copeau, there is a different temper: another background of impulse and desire. To begin with, Copeau's words are solemn. Sometimes, almost, they are dry. Here is a man laboriously performing, not for applause, but for some inner faith. Brieux is shattered, not in epigrams, but in syllogistic paragraphs, point by point. Her vieu is stultified, not on the basis of his ideals or his temperament or his politics (as Shaw would

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have done it) but from the stern basis of æsthetics and of dramatic technique. It is the surgeon at work upon some pathologic member: the sober craftsman. Perhaps, already, his contemporaries must have recognized this fact, and resolved to give him the chance he had not yet had, to become indeed the craftsman.

Those early essays of Copeau help greatly toward an understanding of the theater that was to follow. It is significant, for instance, that although they constitute one of the most stirring collections of pragmatic discussion on the modern stage, Copeau should never have brought them out in book form. For him, they were pieces of practical preparation. He did not intend to ask Paris to dwell long over the heap of ruins he had figuratively made of the Old, when the structure of the New would so soon be ready to take Paris in. No man tore down with a more forthright violence. But no man did so with less inherent satisfaction.

There is no doubt: to most critics the technique of destruction is a thing sweet in itself. Destruction may become a voluptuous experience which they never cease to dwell with and to repeat. Our era of æsthetic atrocities has particularly encouraged this type of intellectual satisfaction, and it is no stranger in New York. Many are our critics of difficult temper and easy virtue. Most of the plays they witness are bad: they slash and thrust in consequence with a fair average of justice. But one wonders how they would hide their

chagrin, if, through some miscarriage of the managers, Beauty were to flourish on Broadway. The point about the essays of Jacques Copeau is their strange lack of this satisfaction in attack. They are not clever. They ring with a sobriety that is almost ponderous. They have the sonority of many numbers. They bespeak, indeed, not alone the indignation of one man, but of a generation: not alone its passion to destroy and cleanse, but its dream to create. They reveal Copeau already for what he was to be: the spokesman of a Group.

At the time, however, Copeau did not know this. The Group did not know this. The Group did not know itself.

Groups, indeed, of the sort which make, rather than ape, literary movements, are always mostly matters of perspective. They are not bothered about titles, they know no hierarchies. A number of men come together from the corners of France, come together each with his individual tools and his individual dreams, in search of the buried treasure of the truth. And they have the same notion of where the treasure lies. So they dig together: and then quite naturally, they rest together: they begin to talk and to listen. And they discover that they have indeed the same notion of where the treasure lies. So they go on working together. . . There is no more to it than that.

One can picture Copeau, those days in Paris, and the years that followed. Denmark, Russia, the

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alien problems of industrial production in the Ardennes, lay behind him, an arduous, inarticulate past. One day, he had come upon a book entitled “L’Immoraliste” by a certain André Gide. He was in Denmark then. But at once he was at home, he was close in spirit to another Frenchman. The book’s passionate precision, its deep delving into the arcana of our sense where lurk the color and the spirit of life, and whence we can compose a rationale of refuge from the sterile anarchy of modern disorder, moved Copeau to words of his own. He wrote what he felt—a tithe of what he felt—to a little magazine in Paris. I believe it was to *L’Ermitage*. Gide responded. The two men were friends: for they had found that they were digging close together. . . So Copeau and Charles-Louis Philippe found each other: Philippe who already was at work, fermenting beauty from the crass vintages of life; a true modern, also, with his vision of the viscous Paris slums agleam in the fires of human spirit, and with his sense of the interpenetrating planes of human conscience and desire which are the tools of modern art. . . Paul Claudel showed Copeau his plays. And Copeau had perhaps his first bitter revelation of the poverty of a social state in which such dramas could exist without a theater; had perhaps an unformed vision of a stage flexible and strong to support such soaring architectures, express these plastic forms of mystic color and human flesh.

But most particularly, Copeau came to know

Péguy. One might almost say, in speaking of the origin of present Parisian movements, that all of Paris was coming to know Péguy. . .

Péguy was a type of the French peasant sublimated: canniness lifted into a dialectic of vital humor, tireless fidelity to toil turned into the passion of spiritual service, the laborer's meaty strength become a tower of vision. His "Cahiers de la Quinzaine" had been the stronghold of the defenders of Dreyfus; they became the stronghold of the defenders of France against all of her foes: her politicians, her bankers, her "intellectuals." In them appeared the great work of Romain Rolland: but chiefly Péguy's own apostrophes to the youth of France that defined the terms for a new generation; and his own *mystères* and *tapisseries* that released a flood of life upon the literary present which a whole century of successive schools had effectually dammed.

Péguy believed in Copeau. He loved in him the uneasy craftsman like himself, the adventurer in thought and beauty, the inspired workman plowing old fields with the steel of his wrath, planting new seeds, as he did. And Copeau understood Péguy: understood that without this master's single-handed labor during lonely years, there could have been no harvest.

Meantime, he went on writing his papers against the theater. He had declared aggressive war on the art to which he was, at the end, in the words

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of André Gide, "to reconcile us all." He had no closer actual contact with the stage.

And of course, the commercial theater went on also. But in the quiet quarters of the *rive gauche*, there was an ever quickening vibration: a stirring of minds: a coalescence of resolve such as makes history in France, even if the Boulevard des Italiens does not find it out for another decade. These men needed an organ: actual common ground. In 1909, the *Nouvelle Revue Française* made its first appearance. Its contributors, whose work had hitherto been scattered through the anonymity of a score of journals, were the new generation of French letters.

Now, all this is rather a remote and devious approach to the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. The way of Jacques Copeau, the way of France, was just so devious. And this is less surprising if one turns to look for the theater in which Copeau was to become himself, and failing to find it realizes that before all else it had to be discovered.

There were plenty of theaters in Paris: plenty of dramas outside the theaters: plenty of talent. Even there were two stages nationally endowed for the keeping green of the dramatic art. The French theater had its usual heritage of form and style. It had everything, but life.

Molière, for instance, at the Théâtre Français was fairly swathed in love of the tradition. Indeed, he was armored in it; and the coat of mail

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was rusty and far too small about his stifled body. On the boulevards, there was perhaps no Molière, but there were Capus and Porto-Riche, Mirbeau and Courteline: many men of discernment, of dramatic tact, even of power. In their published works, one knew this: but on the stage, their dramas seemed to disappear. The manager, the producer, the actor, all had so many more urgent matters on their minds! Problems of sacrifice to that vast and imaginary idol, Public Taste; problems of sensation (the far more vital dramas of the Press Agent that go before the drama of the author); problems of costumes and of vedettes. No energy was left to breathe life into the Play. It showed its lack. . . And then, of course, there were dramatists in France whose work was too substantial, too integral to be fit for the transformations of the theatrical producer. Such men were left, perhaps religiously, alone. They included most of the classics, and all of the writers of the younger generation in whom the generation lived. These aspirants were homeless.

Such briefly, was the practical state of the French theater, as Copeau looked about him, hungry for participation. For it must not be forgotten that participation was the keynote of his interest. If he was still solely a man of letters, he was a man of the theater deferred. Nothing stood between him and his desire save the theater itself. . . It had become either an elaborate affair of exhibition, a show in which the place of the play

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was not so inviolate as that of the "copy" in an advertisement. Or else, it was an affair of archeology, of intellectualism, of esoteric vapors. It had fallen so far as even to have forgotten its place of grace: a platform where men and women were instruments for the poetry of human action. The drama was degraded. It had no apologists even among the intellectuals. The cry of the day was indeed for the saving of the Theater. But the methods proposed seemed largely to assume that the Drama had better disappear.

But what if Copeau grew tired of looking about Paris, and grew aware of Europe? What would he find there? Certain local manifestations doubtless, that had his complete sympathy. Among them, notably, the work of the Irish Players, the genius of John M. Synge. But it was plain that Copeau could bring this eager movement no closer contact, take from it no nearer lesson. The Irish Theater was the expression, in art, of the social and political plight of a subject people. It was the impulse of self-affirmation against certain very real powers of effacement let loose upon the Irish lands. But much was brewing elsewhere: in Berlin and Florence, Switzerland and England. Copeau knew this. And yet, there was an underlying trend in stage undertakings, however divergent, throughout Western Europe, that instinctively kept him away.

On the Boulevards the drama was degraded, and substituted for it we have seen what lavishment of

commercial makeshifts. But in the theater of Max Reinhardt, to take an obvious example, the drama also was sick and evanescent. Although here, there were substituted for it trappings of light and color, the splendor of another art. Indeed, much of the theater's *art nouveau*, most of what New York has hitherto been offered in its name, finds its rationale in the decadence of the written play. What the dramatic artist has abandoned, the artist in color and costumes triumphantly invests. It is his will, not to serve the play, as he has always in halier days, but to draw the public's eye from the play's lack, and to fill the emptiness of the stage with his own additions. One cannot blame him. One need not hesitate to admire his success of the last score years in making his audience forget that the "play's the thing." Yet it is true that the history of recent theatrical activity has been the obverse side of recent dramatic inactivity. Men of the theater have been constrained to accept the dearth of a respectable and vital drama: to make up for it by the substitution of some other force that might live upon the stage: and to build up their methods, not so much on what they found, as on what they failed to find. At the heart of the work of Max Reinhardt lies a disrespect for the essential elements of drama. At the basis even of the far more serious work of Gordon Craig lies a disregard, not alone for drama as it is immemorially considered, but for the actor. Craig has found in current conditions an incen-

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tive for his love of Egyptian marionettes: an encouragement to his obsessions with the graphic and abstract details of the theatrical artform. He has found nowhere in the spoken theater, nor in the written drama, a reason to compel him to change his mind.

The historian will look on the epoch through which we have lived as a sort of interregnum during which creative minds in love with the theater bent their best energies to the task of learning to do without the Play. He will so explain the superb pictorializations of Gordon Craig, the abstract reflections of Adolphe Appia upon the Wagnerian Cycle: and with this meaning dispose of the devitalized baroque effects of Reinhardt and of his host of imitators. To Craig and Appia will go great credit: to the legacy of the draughtsman and the musician toward some future restoration. But at the same time, the historian will understand why, in his formative years, Copeau could not turn more wholly toward them, take more organically from them. For in the work which he found everywhere about him was an implied curtailment of the authority of the spoken drama upon the stage: and the spirit behind this reservation was precisely what Copeau had come, with all his energies, to destroy.

Granted his major tenet, that the literary drama must remain the soul of the theater, much of the brilliant work of our times is the brilliance of decadence. Everywhere, intellectual effort on the

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stage was running counter, either directly or by evasion, to a primal law of the art. And in this great negation, many divergent movements were caught up. It related the commercial stage upon which drama simply had been killed to such reactions as the dialogues of Shaw, upon whose lack of form and æsthetic substance he had propped his platform of social argument. And to these, no less clearly, the projected art of Gordon Craig with its exaltation of the picture. It was under the blight of this negation that Copeau's dream continued to be homeless.

If then, the approach of Copeau toward the theater seems strange and devious, the reason was simply that *his* theater did not accessibly exist. Look where he might, at home or abroad, he had not found it. The soul of drama was a sputtering candle upon the stages of Western Europe. Perhaps, in his subsequent rôle of returning it to its rightful power, the early career of Jacques Copeau seems the infallible path of his creative instinct. Not in the times of Shakespeare, nor of Molière, nor of Ibsen, would this purely literary training have been a possible anticipation. The spirit of the drama was rife and ruddy in the theater of their days: these men had no quicker path than to open the stage door and find it. But in the case of Copeau, it was logical to reverse the process: to write his essays, direct a magazine, to subdue the spirit of the classics in the library to which they

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had retreated, so that he might come properly equipped to an empty stage.

These depths of the French stage were shared by its neighbors. The new era had finally brought about the complete shifting of social and industrial prestige. The moneyed middle class had emerged: it was hungry to be amused: it was full of the means to buy amusement. But of that spiritual life which is the true endowment of a theater, it had none. And of that contact with the planes of higher human effort whence comes the stuff of art, it had been robbed by its too swift emergence. Here, however, the specific character of France entered and transformed the problem.

Copeau was essentially French. In him, was the saving strain, perhaps the Europe-saving strain of a French tradition. For there is no tradition in modern Europe so great in its defense of the Word, in its love of the Word: there is no other modern culture in which the common means of speech—prose—has evolved a continuous artform. It was doubtless this racial character which determined Copeau's part, and which kept the Paris stage, however low it lay, untouched by the blandishments of unliterary innovators. The French theater was degraded. But it must rise from its own base.

The French love spectacle. But never in their history have they lost a sense of the gulf between spectacle and drama. It was hence only natural that their sure instinct, their instinct in Copeau,

should have led away from the prevailing *pittoresque* of the European theaters.

Meantime, the busy group on the *rive gauche* multiplied in faith and in works. The *Nouvelle Revue Française* was a home: it gave the self-assurance of continuous articulation. And with this acquisition had come new health and the impulse toward new conquests.

I cannot here go into the manifold expressions of their quickening energies. They are too diverse. The men standing for them are too many who deserve the complete devotion of an essay. But perhaps an example will serve. The *Revue* had spread out, almost at once, into a House of publication. Now, the art of bookmaking in France is historic. But it survived in extravagant and exotic forms. The mass of French publications had succumbed to the insensitive form of the machine. The usual French book at three francs fifty—yellow back and muddy page—was an abomination. Not so with the editions of the *Revue*. If this group published books, it was in their nature first to redeem the art of publication. And if they had to revolutionize a standard, they must do so without raising the price. For it must be borne in mind, these men were not rich, not endowed. They helped each other communally. The man responsible for this particular work was Gaston Gallimard. He brought to it the simple, craftsmanlike intelligence of the new inspiration. He infused into the making of books that same salubrity of style and strength

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of thought which they all hoped to win from the encroaching mass of industrial disease. So that today, a large share of contemporary letters exists in a new standard form, designed by Gallimard; orderly, proper, a beauty to the eye. And it may well yet be, thanks to the skill of this man, that only works of dim vision and slatternly control will henceforth be compelled in France to issue upon those muddy, ill-marginated pages which we have so long docilely accepted as part of a French tradition.

I stress this detail merely as a sign of the complete reorientation of these men toward their actual surroundings. Their theater was bound to come. In a society where, through the very nature of their ideals, they were secluded and remote, their theater was bound to come last. In a spiritual civilization, where the poet and the priest are the high man and the public man, their theater must have come first. But in the noisy modern city, where the reign of money has set a price on beauty, the wonder is that it came at all. For making magazines and books that can go forth slowly, seeking their friends in the world, is one thing: quite another is a public hall that must live in the world, and confront the suffrage of a society whose laws are based upon the laws of barter.

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Already, Copeau knew, and his friends knew, that the theater would be. Already, certain active steps toward its achievement had been taken. In

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1909, Copeau's dramatization "Les Frères Karakazov" came to the stage of the Théâtre des Arts. And Copeau came along. At last he had won the experience of a metropolitan production. But he had won something infinitely more important. Through this early enterprise he had discovered the two men who were to be the practical mainstays of his theater. . .

Charles Dullin had run away, as a boy, from a château in Savoy, because he loved the theater. He had learned on his arrival in Paris that a corollary of that love must be his detestation of the theaters of the Boulevards. Fortunately, there were other forms of the art to engage his genius; forms, less respectable perhaps, but closer to the dramatic founts. Dullin became a reciter in the cafés of Montmartre—the earliest home, also, of the art of Yvette Guilbert. He became a master in modern guise of the classic *comédie improvisée* which persists in the cabarets and fairs of provincial France. He learned to recite Villon in such a manner as to bring back that ancient vagabondage, throbbing and bleeding, into the heart of life. In Copeau's production, Dullin created the rôle of Smerdiakov—that deepest incarnation of the blood of Dostoyefsky—and he astounded Paris.

The other great discovery was Jouvet. Louis Jouvet was a druggist: a druggist, that is, with a diploma, but with no stomach for his work. He had no shop, indeed, but he did have a theater. His theater also, like the Montmartre of Dullin, was

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decently above the rut of the great Boulevards. It was one of those unkempt *salles de quartier* sacred at least to that memory of drama which is the world of the "melo." Copeau recognized in Jouvet, not alone an actor of genius, but as well a craftsman for whom the stage had remained a temple to humble, human effort.

I see no chance in the theatrical pasts of these two future captains selected by Copeau. Drama had retreated from the Boulevards: it was beaten and lowly. It was by no means dead. In the cheap *quartier* theaters to which the workman brings his wife and children, in the drenched smoke of the *taverne*, among the *bistros* and improvisators of barrack and provincial fair, it had entrenched itself. It had fled back to the people who once supported its high ancestry—the *commedia dell' arte*. And here, in its last hiding, Copeau sought it out, and mustered his practical collaborators. Paris was yet to wonder whence came the fusion, in his art, of the essential and exquisite spirit of today with all that honesty of limb, briskness of mood and suppleness of mind which once distinguished the *comédien de la foire*.

In the Spring of 1913, Copeau and his friends were hunting their neighborhood of Paris for an empty hall. Jouvet, Dullin and Gallimard, the artist who published books and who was now to administer a theater; Jean Schlumberger, the dramatist and critic who had also helped found the

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Revue; Charles Pacquement; Henri Ghéon whose *tragédies populaires* were perhaps too popular to find a place on the Paris stage; Francis Jourdain who designed the first *décors*;—these men were among them. A bit farther removed from the actual labor at hand, such writers as André Gide, Jacques Rivière, secretary of the *Revue* and certainly one of the most creative of modern critics; Paul Claudel, Emile Verhaeren, Suarès, Vildrac, Valery Larbaud. . .

The rue du Vieux Colombier is an old thoroughfare in a compact and complete quarter of old Paris. It leads from the Saint Sulpice, one of the few churches of Paris that still retains a hold upon its immediate surroundings. The great structure dominates the Square in which it stands. The ancient streets that tumble down to it from the rue de Vaugirard and that proceed with heightening worldly pride toward Saint Germain des Près are quick with its spiritual life; somehow cast free by its high mood from the encroaching spell of mercenary Paris. Ecclesiastical shops border the Square. They are full of ugly things. And yet their sculptured saints and dramatic tableaux seem in their very decrepitude to point to the ancient Motherhood of the Church in art and in the drama. The Church is the cradle of the stage. Near it, Copeau and his friends found what they wanted. . .

From the sidewalk, one passed through a long, lugubrious vestibule fitted up with musical slot-machines and penny movies: the archetype of

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nickelodeon which we still have on Clinton and Fourteenth Streets. The hall was a little place, seating scarce five hundred. It was done in the gilt pastry work called Louis Quinze, and it was dedicated to all the vagaries of strictly local talent.

It was rented at once. The vestibule was turned into a series of offices. Francis Jourdain was let loose upon the stale pastries of the interior. Most of them disappeared: all of the gilt. Emerged a chaste, little theater, done in black and yellow with a green curtain before a stage which even Jourdain's cleverness could not materially enlarge.

Meantime, Copeau was selecting his troupe. Some friend of his lent him a garret in which to interview the candidates. It was above that respectable portion of a Parisian house which is equipped with stairs: one reached it by ladder. I can imagine Copeau waiting in the dawn of that dim place, with the light of a single window sharpening the cut of his head against the darkness: and the prospective artists clambering up, laboriously, stumbling, toward him through the hatch in the floor. I see the symbol.

But at last, he had his theater. He had his company. (Including Jouvet and Dullin, it comprised that summer just eleven.) The question was: what else did Copeau have?

Perhaps his first step with his troupe will be the beginning of an answer. He took them away from Paris. He was not employing these young artists. He was going to live with them. In the Depart-

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ment of Seine-et-Marne, Le Limon is tucked away with its gardens in the breast of the gay green hills. Here was Copeau's home: a peasant's house large enough for him and his family and his books. The company took lodgings in neighboring peasants' houses. And their work began. During five hours of each day they studied repertoire. But they did far more. They performed exercises in physical culture and the dance: they read aloud: they invented and acted improvised dramatic scenes. They worked, thus, upon their bodies, their voices and their minds: made them subtle instruments in their command.

Copeau had not been pondering a playhouse all these years with the result of not knowing what to do with it, when once he had it. At the basis of his conception of the theater was that social organism which is forever cropping up, a true microcosm, in the activities of France. Thus, even his troupe was to him a detail, essential but not basic, of his plan. What Copeau planned was a School —a school for the renovation of the French dramatic art. His true theater would be the building of the students of that school. Copeau knew well he might not even be there to see them build it. But he knew likewise that he could not have his school, without the theater to stamp his methods with reality. Here was a paradox. He met it with the determination to make his theater and his troupe as much of a school as it was possible to make them.

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The reader must not take from this the false conception of a stodgy and remote abstraction: a sort of colorless conservatory for future splendors. The everyday temper of Copeau's work is gayety: is immediacy of experience and of realization. He is the disciple of his friend, Henri Bergson, sufficiently to know that our growth and recreation into the tomorrow are simply the outcome of our complete experience today. His troupe was the beginning of a dramatic school. But Copeau knew that if he would win even a slim success against the bad realities about him, he must combat them, not with theories, but with realities of greater valence. He must offset the false life of the commercial theaters with life of another order. And if he hoped for results, he must provide that the life of his theater be not dimmer, not more remote and more abstract, but be more living and more engaging. His theater lived, in order that the generation of athletic actors whom he hoped to rear might at once have a world to live in.

Native talent, moreover, is no rare thing in Paris. Copeau himself, whose program called for no compromise with what existed, and for no expectation from it, could not deny this. His point of attack was chiefly the application of what all social critics say of our social structures: that the lack of spiritual orientation, of institutional integrity and of organic discipline had made the theater the destroyer, rather than the parent, of that native talent which forever flows upon it. It

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was not impossible, even with his standards, for Copeau to fill his company. With the results obtained in a single year, working as he did in the limiting conditions of a swift experiment, he began to see what the future might unfold, with the tools of his art perfected.

The little group labored for two months at Le Limon. They learned that the one originality of interpretation which was not anathema was that which grew organically from a profound knowledge of the text. They learned that the voice, in acting, was no isolated instrument, but one of many; and that it depended for its effectiveness upon a harmony which included the entire physical and mental state of the artist. They learned that the true *mise-en-scène* was the integrated sum of every gesture, every word, every color and every volume upon the stage: that the dramatic art is an orchestration in which all of the senses are enlisted, and of which the written play is the determining score. They learned to look on themselves as individual leaders, each entrusted with the disposition of a certain number of intellectual and æsthetic forces, of which they had to make such use as to bring about the dramatic action: recreate the spiritual content of the play. In brief, they learned many simple and well-nigh forgotten things. They unlearned most of what was Law in Paris. And then, they came to Paris. . .

But not before Paris had been warned into an attentive mood. Paris is not perfect: but surely

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it is the most tolerant City in the world. In its compact, subjective life, its awareness to the state of all its parts, it is like a family. But in its hospitality to individual points of view, it is unlike any family that I have ever met. Paris loves to be talked to: to be nudged, bullied if need be, into a respectful mood. Whence comes the habit of manifestoes among her artists. Any young Rastignac of a new generation can mount the escarpments of Montmartre, blow his horn, and have Paris looking up, critically perhaps but carefully, to catch his words. It was now Copeau's hour of attention. . .

He called his paper "Un essai de rénovation dramatique." It appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, as well as in pamphlet form. I can give no better measure of its spirit of dramatic housecleaning than by the quotation of some of his words.

"By good fortune," says Jacques Copeau, "we have reached the age of man without despair. To the detested realities about us, we oppose desire, aspiration, resolution. We have on our side that Chimæra, we carry in us that illusion, which bring the courage and the joy of enterprise. And if we must name specifically the sentiment that moves us, the passion that drives us and compels us forward, and to which we must finally give in, it is: Indignation."

"A mad industrialism which from day to day more cynically degrades our French stage and re-

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pels from it the cultured public; the monopoly of the greater part of our theaters by a handful of amusers in the hire of merchants without shame; everywhere, and even in such high places whose authority should bring with it a certain sense of pride, the same spirit of show and speculation, the same nadir of taste; everywhere the spectacle of an art that is dying and of which there is no longer even question, in the parasitic toils of bluff, of auction methods, of exhibitionism; everywhere, shallowness, disorder, ignorance and folly, contempt for the artist, hatred of beauty; an over-production becoming ever emptier and more futile, a body of criticism becoming ever more complacent, a public taste wandering wider and farther from the truth:—these are what anger us and now lift us to revolt.

“This indignation, others beside us have felt, before us have expressed. But even among the stoutest of heart, how many have been forced slowly to resign their anger? In some instances, intimidation has shut their mouths; good fellowship has debauched them; or else sheer weariness has let their pens fall from their fingers. There will be new complaints: the protests of youth will continue to rise up. But is it enough to protest? Is it enough to fight for a lost cause: to sharpen the vain shafts of one’s criticism: to withdraw to the bitterness of selfish contempt? We cannot join in a discontent that remains inactive. While the best among us go on expressing their prefer-

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ences and their repulsions, holding high their individual tastes above the ruck of general corruption, the evil spreads about us, and the time approaches when, in the domain of art which is ours and which is our domain, we shall no longer have the spot on which to place our feet.

“We believe that today it no longer is sufficient to create strong works. Where will they find a welcome, in what place gather together their audience and their interpreters, create an atmosphere in which to live? We have thus fatefully been driven, as by an absolute postulate, to this great problem: to put up from intact foundations a new theater: that it may be the rallying point for all those, authors, actors, spectators, who are tormented by the need of once more restoring to the stage its inherent beauty.”

Copeau’s paper differed in this from most: it went into details of practice, scarcely at all into details of theory. It had a great deal to say about repertory, the function of the classics, the nurture of vital, modern works. It discussed the problems of the troupe, methods of rehearsal, the project of the *élèves-comédiens* to whose forerunning *chartreuse théâtrale* near La Ferté-sous-Jouarre the cynical Parisian critics were already pilgrimaging. But it had little to say about the projects and realizations of the contemporaries in the field of Europe: Stanislavsky, Reinhardt, Fuchs and Erler, Craig and Granville Barker. And that little was largely praise behind whose

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acknowledging terms the accent of reservation was almost imperceptibly concealed. A most amazing manifesto! Listen to this:

“Whatever our avowed preferences as critics, our personal direction as men of letters, we do not represent a school. . . We bring with us no formula in the belief that from its embryon there must inevitably spring the theater of tomorrow. Herein lies a distinction between us and the undertakings that have gone before. These—and it can be said without umbrage to the best known among them, the Théâtre Libre, and without depreciation of the high merits of its chief, André Antoine to whom we owe so much—these fell into the imprudent and unconscious error of limiting their field of action with a program of revolution. We do not feel the need of a revolution. . . We do not know what is to be the theater of tomorrow. But in founding the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, we are preparing a place of haven and work for tomorrow’s inspiration.”

Have there been many such groups of rebels in the endless lists of Paris, men who denied that they were rebels, and boasted that *originality* was something that they did not bring with them, but would find in the course of their daily work? Perhaps they are as rare as that principle of inherent growth and as the originality of true self-expression which characterized these men. Their disavowal of a revolutionary program pointed to an inner consciousness of power which had no need

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of the prop of self-assertion. Most *a priori* programs of artistic revolution are whistlings in the dark. These men had brought their own lights along: and, like most lights, they were visible already.

Nothing better marks their strong confidence than their behavior toward the classics. They were reacting not alone against the harlotries of the commercial stage; but as well against the pseudo-modern will to "get even" with the tyranny of the past by ignoring it, or to "make good" the present dearth of drama by finding new strange gods to worship on the stage. These artists seemed to realize that the one way to make that addition to the past which is the present and future of art, was to master the past. They were so firm in their intuition of today, in their sense of promise for tomorrow, that they dared openly commune with Molière and with Shakespeare. They were not so afraid of the classics as to be unable to respect them.

Somehow, they had caught the principle of growth; they had guessed that the true revolution is but a quickened hour of increase, a centripetal, not centrifugal proceeding. The poet, about to create, goes deep within himself, seeks the fertile subsoil of his life. In a like mood, these poets of the Scene returned first of all to the classics. They were aware that the seed must send roots downward: that a tree grows from its trunk.

During the one season which they were to hold

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in Paris before the War, the Vieux Colombier contributed fourteen dramatic creations to the theater. They were among the classics: "L'Avare," "L'Amour Médecin," "La Jalousie de Barbouillé" of Molière; Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," and Heywood's "A Woman Killed with Kindness": among the moderns of a past age, Dostoyefsky's "Frères Karamazov," Musset's "Barberine," "La Navette" of Henri Becque: and among contemporary works: "Le Pain de Ménage" of Jules Renard, "La Peur des Coups" of Courteline, Claudel's "L'Echange," Jean Schlumberger's "Les Fils Louverné," "L'Eau de Vie" of Henri Ghéon and Martin Du Gard's "Le Testament du Père Leleu." Their immediate projects included productions of Æschylus, Euripides, Racine, Corneille, Marivaux, Beaumarchais and Ibsen; and of such of their fellows as Tristan Bernard, Francis Vielé-Griffin, André Suarès, Jules Romains, Alexandre Arnoux and Jacques Copeau.

In addition to this central work, mornings of poetry recitation were held from the beginning. They revitalized a panorama harking back to the Twelfth Century, to the "Chanson de Roland" and the "Chansons pour La Croisade"; that included Rutebœuf, the "Fabliaux, the ballades of Froissart, Deschamps, Villon; and that closed only with the unpublished work of a new Youth beyond such immediate moderns as Claudel, Péguy and Francis Jammes.

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When Jacques Copeau first looked at his little stage, he had only a negative conception of the *mise-en-scène* which he was to work out upon it. He knew what was inadequate to his vision of the drama: the adequate still remained behind. I have pointed out already that this movement was no intellectual affair based upon *a priori* creeds. It was essentially a very human affair, based upon very concrete social and material conditions. And among these conditions, none was of greater rank than Poverty. Indeed, Poverty was more than a condition: it was an integral ideal. There is in this neither chance nor affectation. Consider what the Vieux Colombier was, in relation to the world. It was no reaction from the commercial theater upon that theater's plane: it was a lifting up of the theater upon another plane: or rather, the invasion of another plane upon the theater. And it was very specially a revolt from all those artistic hindrances and falsities that come with a great financial burden. The Vieux Colombier had vowed to do without the triumphs of the market-place in order to be without its jurisdiction. It moved outside the vicious circle of material competition and material success. And it had no æsthetic independent of its morale. Simplicity, therefore, almost chastity of means were among the premises of its departure.

This attitude brought the strength of certain deprivations. Many of the mechanisms and effects which are the staff of the commercial stage and, in

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elaborated form, the boast of the decorative schools, were ruled from the accounts. Our times have a besetting sin: the *picturesque* of our verse, of our painting, of our stage is the modern aggravation of the *baroque*. And the same impulse fathers it —an inner emptiness disguised by much peripheral activity. The *Vieux Colombier* had none of it. Almost with violence, it returned to that mood of inner search and contemplation, which is the antithesis of the *picturesque*.

Not till after he had mastered his own realities did Copeau learn in later studies how similar had been the problems of Shakespeare and Molière. The freedom of the Elizabethan action, the purity of the drama of Classic France grew strictly from the limiting material conditions of those times. Spirit and mind had risen in the lack of mechanical devices. This discovery gave Copeau the vitalizing force of a great example.

What he possessed, then, was chiefly a company of actors, and a little stage. From them, he won that texture of fluid physical design which is peculiarly his own. As his stage and his means developed, he made use of his resources to variate his method. He did not stray from it. He came to employ double and triple planes, to utilize every corner of proscenium, apron, base. But all of his uses of form and color and dynamic line sprang and spring still from the inner exigency of his first material problem: his possession of a small stage and a few actors and little else.

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Quite as directly do they spring from his conception of the dramatic art. The play is a human action; an action, that is, in three dimensions. It might be called volumnear. Copeau creates for it upon the stage, and *with* the stage, a volumnear expression. Just so simply can be defined the æsthetic of the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier.

As the plays of the repertoire come to the little stage they are regarded as forms of composition. The problem is how these compositions may best be recreated *into form*. First of all this must mean, placed into space. Finally, it must include the placing of all the physical components of the acted play into sure harmony with the play's basic form. The means of creating the form include everything seen and heard by the spectators. All of these means, then, must *conform*, not alone in a passive, but in an active sense. They must constitute an active hierarchy of controlled forces whose resultant will be the dramatic work of art.

If we examine these elements, we find first of all the actor. And we understand why, with his simplicity of means, the actor becomes Copeau's amplest instrument. Copeau believes that in his possibilities of voice, language, gesture, personal and integrated movement, and decoration, the actor should come first, quite irrespective of the producer's material resources. In this fact, already, he parts with many of his confrères. The actors, then, in their individual movements create linear designs. In the ensemble of these movements, the design be-

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comes volumear, or three-dimensioned. In their gestures, the form has its shadings and its emphasis; in the reading of the dialogue, it has at once its outline and its atmosphere. The chief function of the costumes rises from the necessity of an æsthetic marriage between the human and the non-human elements in the design. There must be a background: certain materials in the form of draperies, drops and properties are needed for the elucidation of the play. These also must be organically merged into the desired form. Their composition and their colors are thus vitally important. For if these also do not *conform*, they must, in the integrated unit of the play, necessarily conflict. But the costumes of the actors visually join into the stuff and architecture of the stage from the viewpoint of the spectator. They must therefore blend with them, as well, from the viewpoint of æsthetic unity. But Copeau relies upon the *décor* chiefly for mood, for those secondary and flat effects which shall best throw up the volume and movement of his human groupings and of the uttered lines.

From this means of creating scenic volume comes a new freedom of choice. The producer is released from the narrow exigencies of paint and canvas: he takes possession of a field whose fertile limits Copeau has not begun to measure. And yet its mechanical advantage is but the secondary value of this method. Its first is its essential fidelity to the spirit of drama, itself. For drama is eternally

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concerned with the planes, colors, metabolic changes of human action. These qualities are plastic. Drama is a plastic art. And in that fact alone, the power of major scenic reliance points to its limitation. It is true that there has been the tendency to stress the graphic in the theater: but we have seen how it went hand in hand with the neglect of drama. Copeau obeyed an infallible instinct when he turned to the most plastic means at his disposal: the dimensions of human bodies, of human movement and of human utterance.

Consider his production of "Twelfth Night." This comedy of Shakespeare has little weight as a dramatic action. It has infinite vistas of poetic charm. Its chief virtues are its airiness, its free dimensions, its swift succeeding silhouettes of character and colors of mood. It was precisely these qualities that came forth in Copeau's handling. The play moved from four levels: the balcony, the main stage, the proscenium doors on either wing, the dungeon underneath the apron where Malvolio was imprisoned. From these four planes, the characters wove a design of fantastic movement. It lifted and wafted in the foreground of the play. And in the background, from out the shadows under the balcony of the Countess, roared the laughter of the tippling clowns—Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and their fellows—whose antics are the true motivation of the piece. These tracerries of human movement, fragilely freighted with the color of costumes and with the perfume

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of the Shakespearian speech, moved back and forth upon the scene like some magic fancy. They were a form indeed—diaphanous and forever running on—of the romantic action. The Shakespearian words were of course not there. But all of their magic, all of their virtue had somehow found a form in the unrolling movement.

“Twelfth Night” is a nosegay fluttering loosely in an April wind. But such a work as “Les Fourberies de Scapin” is a solid and incisive mass. Observe how the methods of Copeau contrive to meet its problem. The play is a mass, but not without grace: it has the solidity of the mental acrobat measuring his prowess upon volatile trapezes and flimsy paper rings. The design of the play is this: Scapin, an irrepressible unit—and two pairs of lovers and two fathers as the fragile and flighty accessories to prove him. Copeau does not temporize with his design. He sets a naked platform upon the center of his stage. And at once, in its bold, sharp prominence the part of Scapin has a marvelous symbol. This platform stands for Scapin quite as clearly as Scapin, in his pied garment, stands on it. About it move the victims: shifting, uncertain, forever in the shadows:—waves beating against a rock and thrown upon it merely to fall back diminished. Molière stands forth, created. His farce has never been seen in this form; and yet he has not been belied. He has been simply more faithfully, more completely *brought* upon the stage. In the bluff blocking of the scene, in the unceasing

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body movement of the actors, it is his words that live.

These are classic examples. The Vieux Colombier is by no means confined to them, although in modern presentations its specific methods are likely to appear more finely drawn, subtler in their distinction, because of the more tenuous fabric of most modern plays. I think with pleasure of such fragile designs as the "Pain de Ménage" or the "Poil de Carotte" of Jules Renard. I am jumping as wide as possible from the massiveness of Molière. Let us examine the former play. It is a mere dialogue between a man and a woman over their demitasses. Its design is flat. Its values are suggested, after the manner of drawing, by the relation of single lines. This is precisely the mold that the Vieux Colombier makes of it. A flat backdrop. Two figures moving subtly back and forth, and up and down, upon the vertical plane. In the withdrawing and attraction of the bodies to and from the lounge at the right-center, they trace the vista of the drama's lines. In their final divergence, left and right exits, the vertical plane of their lives rewins its permanence—quiet, easeful, empty.

Quite different, such a modern piece of the genre type as "Le Testament du Père Leleu." Here is a play of the frangent colors of peasant life, a play seeped with the acrid odors of the soil. The farce is created for us with swift, blunt strokes of acting: a suggestion of a painter laying color upon

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canvas before our eyes. But the turmoil and conflict are restrained. Soon we feel in them a design, radiating out on either side, forth and back from the dying peasant's bed, and with a circular movement, rollicking and rolling, that somehow denotes the nature of the sly old friend who cheats the law and his confederate in wiles, by willing the estate of the dead père Leleu to none other than himself.

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Of course, close affinities exist between the stage work of the *Vieux Colombier* and the thought of certain contemporary masters. Much of Copeau's use of vertical lines and supplementary planes of action recalls the invention of Gordon Craig. Such a set as that of the last act of the "*Frères Karamazov*," for instance, with its double-flung and terrifying stairs, was not evolved without the example of the English pioneer. There is moreover a certain correspondence in methods of dynamic expression and design, between the practice of Copeau and the theories of Adolph Appia. Appia's text is this: that volume and movement upon the stage are strictly determined by the musical score of the Wagnerian dramas. Copeau works from this departure: that volume and movement upon the stage are determined by the text of the play.

But if I have not dwelt more fully upon all these scholarly details, upon these problems of precedence and influence, the reason is that, in my judgment, the *Vieux Colombier*'s chief meaning does not

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lie among them. It lies rather in the nature of the theater's faith and work: in its social character: in its *existence*. Copeau is primarily a craftsman. The men and women whom he has gathered about him are craftsmen as well. He is the rare type of the executive artist. He has his theories— theories of original and inventive power. But they are merged, in his program, with what he does. And he has brought to the theater what is more lacking than theories: a practical morale. . .

In one year he had created a community of dramatic workers. In one year, this community had already laid the basis of a modern theater and of a modern drama. And they were laying it literally with the work and wisdom of their hands. The actor fertilized his creative, even his literary impulse. The stage-manager remained the inspired artisan. The director himself entered experientially into the life and labor of all of his departments.

Its simplicity and its vitality made the Vieux Colombier a strange event in the chaos and disease of the world at whose heart it was forced to live. And then, after the fair departure, that world crashed about it.

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Of course, with the War, most of the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier flew to the frontiers: all of its energies and will to battle. There, for three years, it remained, a part of the common army that was France. And it was there that Copeau was forced

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to find it, when the official mandate reached him to gather his theater—its work and spirit—and convey them, a message from France, to the United States.

At the beginning of his enterprise, Copeau had been confronted with a dilemma. He had wished to erect a theater with intact material from intact foundations. And in order to do so, he had first had to found a theater. It had been clear to him that there could be no Dream of the sort worthy the creative artist, if first the theater did not stand with doors open upon a street of Paris.

But here was a dilemma far more baffling than the first. The Théâtre du Vieux Colombier was scattered over the battlefields of France, lost in the universal drama of the War. And he had to band it once more together, in mid-air, as it were, and carry it across the sea.

But he had to do even more. He had so to reassemble this subtle instrument of France as to make it comprehensible to an American public. Away from France, homeless in France, he had somehow to recapture for it that spirit which had come solely from its deep place among the lives of Paris.

I believe the American public should be conscious of these elements in the appearance of the Vieux Colombier among us. The Vieux Colombier needs no semblance of apology. What it calls for is understanding. It was a spontaneous movement of self-expression, indissolubly caught in the life of France: of her spirit, her affairs, her soil. Here, it

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has needed to become a conscious conveyer of an idea to a foreign public:—which is quite another matter. Indeed, I believe the marvel is that Copeau should have created so adequate a troupe: recaptured so far a spirit whose deepest nature lay in its unconsciousness, its spontaneity, its lowly activity at home. For France is universal only when she is France. Her conduits to the outer world are the natural avenues of her self-expression. Uprooted, she is diminished.

But the difficulties of the appearance of the Theater in New York have been social and practical, as well as spiritual. In more ways than one, the company have been severed from their bases of operation. Thus, for one thing, freedom of choice in repertoire has had to go before the problem of presenting plays which would be welcome to a foreign people. And still more, there have been the difficulties of preparing productions in a city whose methods and materials are at wide variance from theirs, and which cannot supply those individual needs of scenic and personal creation upon which the entire art of the Vieux Colombier was integrally builded.

After the War, the Group will return to Paris; to their poverty and to their perfection. But they will not have come to New York in vain. For despite the hazards of their visit, the vitality of spirit and integrity of work of the Vieux Colombier have been made manifest among us. And New York, in a way even more grievously than Paris, thirsts

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after the revelation and salvation of a dramatic faith.

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I hold by this essay the more confidently since I have seen the troupe of Stanislavsky. I have no doubt that the Moscow Art Theater came to New York in its autumn; that a great deal of its sap had long since retreated, leaving a certain debile stiffness in the flesh. But even at his best and with the greatest instruments at hand, Stanislavsky could not have raised Alexis Tolstoi and Chekhov and Gorki to the plane of high essential art. Realism, in the accepted modern sense, is apriori mediocre. If you will faithfully examine the great "realists" . . Dostoyefsky, Balzac and Stendhal . . you will find that they are far closer to Æschylus, Apuleus, Cervantes, Racine, El Greco than to what the modern schoolmen mean by realism. The great artist is always a creator of essential æsthetic form, and the more purely this form is real, the more it is abstracted and remote from the reality of the realists. (I am always on the edge of subjects so vast that if I topple in, I'll never get out.) Let me say merely this:

Copeau achieved imperfectly in an æsthetic that is right, insofar as it explains all great art from the Egyptians to Picasso, from Isaiah to Blake, from Æschylus to Synge. Stanislavsky achieved consummately in an æsthetic that is wrong insofar

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as it explains the fall-off of art, from the psychological sculpture of fading Greece to the psychological narrative of Galsworthy and the psychological music of Richard Strauss.

Doubtless I had no right to speak as complacently as I did, in this paper, of Reinhardt, since at that time I had seen none of his Berlin productions. Lee Simonson jumped on me for this with his usual zest of battle. I am crushed, even if not corrected.

11: A Handbook for Americans

ICAN picture some bright American, perhaps a hundred years from now, reading this little volume "Letters and Leadership," of Van Wyck Brooks with an expression of surprise. "How comes it," he will ask himself, "that a man drew so near to the light in those dark days? Or, if the light was indeed seen as this quiet, rather abstract résumé suggests, how comes it that the days were as dark as they appeared?" And sitting in his study under shelves well stocked with great American works, the gentleman will perhaps have a vision of that dim American dawn.

It is precisely in the light and in the hope of this dim dawn that "Letters and Leadership" has interest for us; it is in the fact that the book is clearly of that dawn.

This essay is an incisive ray of light thrown sheer into many shadows of the American problem. It is no exhaustive diagnosis; it is no detailed account of malady and cure. But it is decidedly an approach to all of these. Before we can advance we had better see where we are going; we had better see whence we came. "Letters and Leadership" will help us.

The remarkable thing about so small, even cursory, a book is its impression of soundness. Mr.

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Brooks has a certain number of discoveries to impart about the mood of America, about its development from pioneer beginnings. And we feel under the few words long study and firm conviction. We feel that this criticism is built whole-bodily upon a social consciousness; that it can afford to be sparing of elaboration. We feel that most essential of all emotions toward the critic, faith.

We were a land of pioneers. We tumbled upon America with great suddenness from a score of ethnic worlds. We overran America with a hunger strictly determined by the materials we found here. Our reasons for coming may have been diverse, but our energies in settlement were industrial and economic. Vast timberlands, mountain ranges, rivers brought problems, brought contacts, of a distinctly practical order. For two centuries we solved them, and solved them beautifully. But in the process the deposits of culture which we had brought with us from our several European homes were shaken off, were futile to our new life, were dead. And at the same time, in the very nature of that new life, there could be no energy released—or saved—for the formation of a new culture beyond the level of the very urgent work which a virgin continent had forced upon us. We had a culture to express that life; the “culture of industrialism.” But we won our continent. The day came when it was no longer virgin. The day came when we were compelled to rest from the simple duties of physical dominion. Our energies, so released, swirled back

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upon ourselves, ravenous for new outlets. And so we found that our "culture of industrialism" no longer served us.

Mr. Brooks throws light upon the vast problems entailed in this discovery. He pictures for us a people restless at the path's end; equipped, however, only with such tools as it had needed for the blazing of that particular path. He pictures our people futilely, pathetically, endeavoring now to build fair cities and holy places with the pickax and the shot-gun of the pioneer. For the time of life has come inexorably on us, in which we feel that cities must be fair, and that there must be holy places.

In this connection Mr. Brooks writes of "our critics" and "our awakeners." He pulls the masks from the faces of these worthies and shows them belated nineteenth century wanderers, knowing no better habit for the mind than the old gait of the pioneer, skirting and stripping a continent. He asks us to look clearly at such critics as Paul Elmer More, Irving Babbitt, Woodberry, Brownell and Sherman, until we recognize in their hostility to the first artistic condensations of our energy released from pioneering something far deeper than mere muddle-headedness; until we see in it the inevitable reflex of men tuned in their youth to the compelling rhythm of a people bent on primitive tasks, against mental and emotional departures, which while those tasks remained undone, would have hindered their completion. All of mature

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America is still keyed to a plane of activity which potential America has surpassed. So that a great gulf of misunderstanding breaks the relations which should exist between the authority and institutions of the people and their own immediate development. To bridge this gulf must be our initial step toward an American culture.

Thus also Mr. Brooks discusses our philosophers and pragmatists. He shows hiding behind the pragmatic cult of social efficiency and organization that same need of the pioneer who must combat desire, combat culture as an end, in order to press on. The pioneer's end is obvious enough. No need of speculating about that. What bothers him is the means toward it. With keen reason Mr. Brooks points out how this mental habit determines the attitudes of a man like John Dewey. Exalting the means and organization of social life, he abdicates the search of any end beyond those already premised by the industrial and pioneering era. The movement of America throughout the nineteenth century was on specific tracks—westward tracks. It needed no spiritual direction, no emotive power save those implied in its material program. In fact, any other would have deterred its simple progress. But the pragmatists believe that the old tracks still stand. So that their "awakening" in its lack of any creative orientation comes to spin about in a blind and vicious circle in such a renascent period as ours. For what we need is precisely a new spiritual world above and beneath the hurried structure

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bequeathed us by our fathers. And for its creation we must have a culture of spiritual preferences of just the kind for which the pioneer could have found no use.

But if Mr. Brooks flays the old order and its unconscious satellites of today, it is forever in the cause of the groping, younger generation. The effect of the book is positive. The author is fighting for the creative impulse of American youth, for its feeble stirring in a land altogether given up in its colleges quite as in its factories to the acquisitive, possessive point of view. He is bitter against the bondage of an order which has outlived its usefulness; he is attacking clearly from an instinct of self-preservation and defense. And in pleading for his fellows, one feels that Mr. Brooks is pleading for himself.

Thence, perhaps, the poignant, almost wistful, accent of his book. We see himself, the archetype of the new American youth, barred from the source of spiritual supplies by the taboos and institutions of his elders, stripped of intellectual tools that are arsenaled away in Puritan universities, homeless of tradition and striving to grow his spiritual fruit in a spiritual desert—that desert which his fathers have made, with their materialism and their industrialism, of the American soil.

For Mr. Brooks is too much the student to misprize the spell of the old Puritan temper upon modern cultural conditions. He sees the energies of youth so furiously locked in battle at their very

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birth with an inhibiting generation that it comes forth half spent to the beginning of its own creative life. And if bitterness at times eats through his pages it must be recalled that it is bitterness born of this great conflict, and that devotion to the dream of a great American society is at its heart.

One might wish, because of the solemnity of his cause and the soundness of his thought, that Mr. Brooks had been more explicit in his expositions, more thorough in attack. His book is not so much a finished work as the preface to a book. One is worried lest the truth contained in it fare none too well in an inclement world for want of adequate materialization. Will the reader who does not agree beforehand, at least temperamentally, with his strictures on such men as Mr. Dewey or Mr. Howells, be won over by the few allusive sentences which Mr. Brooks devotes to them? Will the Puritan accept his own relation to the pioneer, after hearing the few essential words of Mr. Brooks upon the subject? One fears not. And one wishes that this well aimed ammunition were backed with more powder, were crammed into a longer gun.

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“Letters and Leadership” is still Mr. Brooks’ most perfect work and it is still the preface of a work that remains unwritten. His one subsequently published volume, “The Ordeal of Mark Twain,” is a

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rich and copiously painted canvas that has been somewhat warped by the author's desire, above all, to prove his point. Mr. Brooks is on safe ground so long as he remains purely the social critic and the social historian. Unfortunately, his materials lead him inevitably into the domain of literary criticism and of æsthetics: and here he is very far from mastery. I believe that much of the adverse judgment that Mr. Brooks has inspired, because of his aloofness from criticism of contemporaries, is beside the point. There is no law compelling an author to select any material or subject in preference to any other. If Mr. Brooks wants to write about Mark Twain or James or Melville, rather than about his neighbors, perhaps he is wise and most certainly he is justified. But unfortunately, the purely literary element enters into a correct discussion of any writer, however remote in years, and however strictly he be treated as a social and psychological symptom. And here Mr. Brooks is weak. If he studied the purely æsthetic phenomena around the corner with a greater zest, his studies of our cultural past might be better founded.

The point as I made it in the first essay in this volume is a tragic one for Mr. Brooks: from whichever facet of the human sphere he chooses to depart, he will find it increasingly hard to go deep without striking the philosophical: the æsthetic and the metaphysic. This is precisely what Mr. Brooks is earnestly trying to avoid.

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12: *The Logic of the Human Body*

THE philosophy and technique of Mr. Alexander* are perhaps best approached through an understanding of the vast human need which called them forth. It is no new story that man's dwelling on the planes of civilization is playing accumulative havoc with those faculties of endurance and control upon which his becoming really civilized depends. Indeed, man's conscience of social helplessness and spiritual disease is the deepest story of the nineteenth century.

The romantic reaction of Rousseau, the mountain-top panacea of Nietzsche, the Christian anarchism of Tolstoi, the divine pity of Dostoyefsky have, all, this common base: that they express man's knowledge of some huge discrepancy between his culture on the one hand and his self-power and desires on the other. The development of the new psychology of Freud is similarly grounded. For it lays bare the conflicts and the ruin brought upon us by this same discrepancy.

And all the social and economic activity of Europe from Proudhon to the great war and from the war to Lenin is the stirring for equilibrium and

* "Man's Supreme Inheritance," by F. Matthias Alexander, with an introductory word by Prof. John Dewey.

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for adjustment. Something is the matter. The universal reports of increased physical and mental degeneration make this plain. The failure of so-called education bears this out. The art and literature of Europe for a hundred years have been tragic paraphrases of the same conclusion. In the work of Mr. Alexander we are at last groping toward a constructive answer.

The simplicity of the answer has probably helped retard its more general acceptance. We have an old habit, bequeathed us by the early Christians, of despising the human body. We prefer to solve our lofty problems by jumping into the clouds. Many of us Americans, indeed, think we can cure even our stomachaches by the same gesture. When, therefore, after the welter of complex metaphysical and transcendental speculation in which we have been floundering for a thousand years, we are told to return humbly and devoutly to our body as to the seat both of trouble and salvation, something in us revolts: something answers back: "Ah, no! We are beyond that! We have gotten over all of that! We are mental, spiritual beings." And, in consequence, the abyss between Desire and Power which has caused all the agony of the modern epoch continues to grow wider.

Briefly stated, Mr. Alexander presents this thesis: Our bodies, like our behavior, were at one time organized for unconscious control, as are the bodies of other animals. Our lives, however, have in civilization been pushed far from those activities

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and patterns of behavior for which the primitive unconscious control was adequate. Unconscious control, in other words, for men who sit at desks and read, and eat sophisticated food, and work at complex machines, and lead emotionally intricate lives, has broken down.

Our bodies are abandoned, therefore, at this climax of civilization, by the one guidance—the instinctive, unconscious one—which nature gave us. In place of it we must achieve another guidance, achieve conscious control to synchronize with the deliberate, organized life of civilization. And until we have this new control there must continue to exist a dangerous gulf between the demands made by society and by our minds upon our organism and its capacities: there must ensue just such physical and nervous breakdown, just such social malady and such soul sickness as brand the last century as the most agonized in the human story.

To have formulated this thesis would have been perhaps enough to gain Mr. Alexander the rather belated recognition he is receiving at the hands of advanced educationists. But what makes his book revolutionary is that Mr. Alexander has done more. He has evolved a technique for the acquisition of conscious control and he has applied and is teaching others to apply it.

It is impossible here to go deeply into the psychological wealth of his methods. Approximately, what Mr. Alexander achieves is a linking up of the lower with the higher activities of the human or-

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ganism. Let me try to make this clear. In modern civilization, our intellect has gone on developing, refining, taking up new spheres of consciousness and new functions of activity. And all of self not included in that surface world of cerebration remains in the unconscious realm of reflex control adequate only to those demands of animal existence upon which and for which it was built up.

Unfortunately, however, civilized mind remains attached to uncivilized body. Results: All manner of functional disorder of which the most common of course are the physical diseases and the psycho-neuroses. Mr. Alexander's method provides a means of doing away with this inner war.

It will be plain at once wherein this method touches upon and differs with the analytic psychology of Freud. Both techniques are means toward the aggrandizement of conscious self. Psycho-analysis by such royal avenues as the dream reaches the hidden deposits of desire and in bringing them up within the sway of the patient's mind empowers his will to make disposal of them. The Alexandrian technique is more than the mere converse of the Freudian. By way of sensory reeducation and manipulation the pupil's mind is brought into contact with the equally hidden scope of his physical and sensory activity.

And when once a unit of will and function is achieved for the psycho-physical self, the pupil is able to cope with the problems of his highly specialized life, quite as the animal with instinctive

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control can cope with the demands of its instinctive world.

There is no need here to compare these two paramount contributions to human progress. Psychoanalysis has given us deeper knowledge of the human psyche in its individual, historical and æsthetic aspect than any other inquiry. And yet there is the justice of logic in the claim that as regards problems of actual functioning, the technique of Mr. Alexander is the more fundamental. Let us take an example: A man is invalidated by neurotic fears. Psychoanalysis makes conscious for him that these fears are in reality suppressed desires and that, unable to face them in himself, he has projected them as fears into the outer world.

Mr. Alexander considers such fears, and indeed all specific nervous and physical maladjustment, to be end symptoms of a general conflict in the functioning of the human organism. We have explained whence, in his judgment, this conflict comes. He therefore thrusts underneath details and by his method makes of his pupil's organism a conscious instrument. This instrument is the result of a correlated mastery of mind and body. By means of it the pupil is enabled to cope not only with specific disorders—including the presence of actual disease. He finds within himself an enhanced power to react, in accordance with the dictate of his mind and will, to all the difficulties that arise from his existence as a social being.

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The psycho-analyzed patient might still remain in a state of helplessness as regards such organic control. The abyss between psychic control and the substratum of sensory and muscular control will not have been bridged. And from this chaos a new conflict might arise, as did the old one. To this conclusion we are led even by the analysts themselves. Adler and Jung have established the source of neurotic disorders in the presence of physical disability and social maladjustment. So that, while the work of Mr. Alexander in no way supersedes the other, it does, from the standpoint of individual functioning and practical education, decidedly cut under it. It reaches direct to the physical foundation of life: to the physical foundation of psychic life. It is therefore a radical contribution to dynamic psychology, and to the entire scale of individual and social progress of which the amelioration of human organism is the tonal key.

Let me take a single instance of its application. Today, under whatever guise of modernity, we still insist that by training a child's mind we are giving it an education. It is plain, however, from Mr. Alexander's thesis, that if the child's inherited plane be one of unconscious control, it can be educated for conscious life in civilization only by a complete and integral reeducation upon the conscious plane. In our failure to act upon this logic of the human body, we create in our schools the beginnings of that very division between mental

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life and functional control whence come all our ills. For with their inadequate inner guidance, the bodies of children subtly break down before the demands of intellectual life. Bad physical habits are formed: eyes weaken, shoulders round, chests grow rigid as the stress of the world's tasks swing the children farther from their unconscious sensory base. And it is the finding of Mr. Alexander that the imperfectly used body brings the inevitable psychic or nervous flaw. Conversely, however, the harmonious organism needfully flowers into healthy psychic articulation.

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13: Passage from Limbo

THE Theater with some of us is a passion which the theaters have not succeeded in destroying. I think I could recall most of the respectable performances which I have seen since I was taken to the "Lilliputians." Yet it is true now, as it was then, that I never watch the curtain rise for the first time without a thrill. The thrill is usually dead within ten minutes. But always, year in year out, it is ready to revive.

One result, I imagine, of a constant thwarting upon a no less constant love is that one's mind acquires a cunning: one learns to watch out for good signs however subtle, to follow the ways of them however dim. I am an optimist about our theater precisely not because our theater is good but because I need the theater: even as certain of us are optimists in life not because life is obviously liveable but because we want to go on living. Whenever possible I dig hope from the dramatic welter. I hold close to the good auguries I find. I employ whatever skill the dearth of a loved thing endows me with, to prove to my heart that my heart's love will thrive. Doubtless I do this to keep up my courage: doubtless, as well, unconsciously, because of the hypnotic virtue of

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asseveration. A Theater in the sun of enough loyal loves may possibly, some season, shine.

When I returned to New York last week I thrust my hand in the theatrical grab-bag, pulled out four plays. They were all bad; but this proves nothing, I am glad to say. It seemed a gesture of promise that Mr. Octavus Roy Cohen should have a comedy of negro life, "Come Seven," at the Broadhurst Theater. I discovered, however, that he had in no way supported his own good intention. His plot was a comedic gem—a design about a stolen and substituted ring which the improvisators of the *Commedia dell' arte* could have welcomed. Mr. Cohen kept his dim eye on the plot, and proved thereby that he had no true eye for the negro. His characters were the conventional blackface types strung upon a line suggested solely by the conventional white man's attitude. There is no hope for a dramatist who, endowed with the good intention of writing a comedy of negro life, lets it go at that.

It seemed worth the effort to learn what Mr. Thomas Dixon would have to say about Abraham Lincoln, after an Englishman had discovered him for Broadway. Mr. Dixon had nothing—absolutely nothing—to say. And although he shared in this respect the anæsthesia of Mr. John Drinkwater, he did not share that gentleman's skill in hiding his emptiness. Mr. Dixon succeeded only in making me ask myself whether the Drinkwater play held a good omen for my search.

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The English play is a fraud. Mr. Drinkwater does not create his characters: he relies on the existence of an image of them in his public and exploits that. In no line of his play is there a trace of subjective evocation, a stir of that dimensional movement—the movement of ideas endowed with personality—which is the artistic act. Mr. Drinkwater exploits our love of Lincoln, our prejudice against his cabinet, our sentiment for the vulgarities of Grant, our disgusting condescension toward the South. He is not a dramatist. He is an impresario, a platform-booker, a sort of historical Major Pond. Between the acts he is the literary snob, the purveyor of shockingly bad verse: with the great man on the stage, he is the historical retailer, the purveyor of blandly allocuted *clichés* summing in their effect the æsthetic total of a Decoration Day Parade.

Now our question: does the vast success of this play presage well? Of the proneness of our critics before so slight a fillip as Mr. Drinkwater let us say no word. What of the public? Surely it is to be pitied, rather than judged. It loves Lincoln, it has in its heart a rousing sense of the drama of Lincoln's life. It goes to the theater to find that drama come alive before it. It is exceeding hungry, exceeding full of faith. It beholds not a play but a sharp revival of the Eden Musée. And since its sense has been dulled by deprivation, its mind lulled asleep in inanition, its ear crammed full of the clamor of the pundits, it does not know the

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difference. . . All this has nothing to do with the drama as an art, with the theater as a home for art, nor with the public as a potential factor in artistic life. Let us seek elsewhere.

Mr. Booth Tarkington having conquered the *Saturday Evening Post*, has of late years become a formidable figure on our stage. A new play of his, "Poldekin," opens at the Park Theater. It was written as a serious contribution. This means that Poldekin, in the original version, is killed in the last act by a fellow Bolshevik who has not become convinced, like the hero, of the dawning divinity of American political institutions. Audiences of smaller cities upon which the play was tried before New York had too keen a sense of humor to permit Poldekin to die. They insisted he should live out his punishment by taking citizen papers. Mr. Tarkington, the good American, bowed to the People's mandate. Poldekin survives. And the play—according to the program—becomes a comedy. With Mr. Tarkington's contribution to the drama of modern social conflict, it is impossible to abide: he has none. His play is the work of a mind so thickly complacent that even *The New York Times* is not satisfied with his portrayal of the argument. Mr. Tarkington is so sure of the national impeccability that he presents no case at all: he does not stoop to! His characters are not even caricatures, not even shadows: they are emanations of a herd mental reflex so deep in love with its passivity that it is conscious of no light, no

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substance beyond it. The irony is, that there are two details in "Poldekin" which in a play by an honest craftsman would have marked the genius. Poldekin asks everywhere: "What is the meaning of America?" and everywhere for an answer receives laughter. What a pregnancy an alive mind could have found in that conception! Swift could have used it to his end, Mark Twain to his: or the hearty mysticism of a modern Whitman in apotheosis of a land brimming over with a significance too high for words, too fair for aught save the most primitive rejoicing. Mr. Tarkington means by it: "Our laws, our homelife and our game of baseball are so obviously superior to any other laws, any other homelife, any other games—how can you ask?" The other detail is equally potential: the one American born person in the play is a prostitute. But by this superb bit of selection Mr. Tarkington desires merely to say: that "America is so pure, even our prostitutes are ladies. America is so *right*, we'll let a whore speak for us."

"Poldekin" is the peak of Mr. Tarkington's direction. There remains nothing higher for him, save to go into Republican or Democratic politics. I recall other of his plays. "Seventeen" was a play about adolescence. It was a sneer, it was a deliberate reduction of the braveries and miseries of youth for the benefit of the comfort and complacence of the old. Mr. Tarkington's audience is a people spiritually weary and depleted. Such

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people win a fine revenge in patronizing an age that is vital and brimful. If youth be regarded as the treasury of life, the way of youth as the way of challenge to truth, the heart of youth as the heart of beauty, a decrepit middle-aged middle class who have abdicated life will be made uncomfortably nostalgic by its portrayal. But if youth is an insipid clownery, full of innocuous defeats, the spiritually defeated may loll in the ease of their own more substantial triumphs of flesh and money. Wedekind's "Fruehlings Erwachen" is a study of youth in a civilization frightened by the menace of denial but still sufficiently in touch with life to revere the hazardous pregnancy of adolescence. "Seventeen" is the confessional of a class which fears nothing so much as pregnancy, which has the conviction that it is unchaste, and that sterility, since it is comfortable, must be pure. The Tarkington play in which Norman Trevor starred earlier in the season is a version of the same theme variated to the extent that the triumphing and sneering older generation which in "Seventeen" is represented chiefly by the audience, is here embodied on the stage: a virile and wealthy father offsetting his ineffectual children and at the end winning even the sexual prize through marriage with the betrothed of his son. Clearly, Mr. Tarkington is the apologist of an entrenched generation—of that part of it which is drooping, desiccated and inert. In these plays he sneers at the

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opposition. In "Clarence" he sets before us the positive side of his allegiance.

Most of the critics hailed "Clarence" as a fine achievement. Since the best of our critics are young, is Mr. Tarkington right in his contempt for youth? We believe not. He would not so aggressively make youth—and youth's ideas—contemptible, if he found youth contemptible. The point of the critics' acclaim of "Clarence" has nothing to do either with youth or with the drama. It shows poignantly how hard it is for a reviewer to be a critic.

I doubt if it would be possible to find a play made of more colorless, brittle, dull-moving substances than this sprightly extravaganza, "Clarence." Within a background of vapid middle-class prosperity the author places as a gleaming gem an ex-soldier who plays the saxophone and collects beetles. This is quite funny, also it is significant. For this sluggish and reticent hero shines as the vital, penetrating force in a family group composed of persons who, until he lifts them up, lie shredded by ugly trivialities. The shallow play (in which this time both children and parents share) of rudimentary sense and emasculated impulse is transfigured by Clarence. And Clarence is Mr. Tarkington's ideal. He has weak eyes, a bad leg, a remote, hence decent passion for bugs: also he has a long biography in *Who's Who* and—here's the point—that inert malice which is in truth the author's, and which is more evil than sin, more sterile than evil.

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(The one man who is sure never to be wrong is the man who dares not say that he is right.)

No: Mr. Tarkington's advent upon our stage is no sign for my wistful searching. Mr. Tarkington is the apologist for American anæmia. He is American, doubtless. But he is American in the way that a eunuch is chaste: as the consequence of a very deliberate and radical excision.

I am convinced of the good intentions that swarmed vaguely in and out, about such enterprises as I have discussed. But I am convinced as well that good intentions have no clear relation with the good auguries I look for. The Theater of America has up to the present been in limbo. But good intentions pave the way to hell. When it is not lost in good performance, a good intention may mean sentimentalism, amateurishness, falsehood and perversion: may mean the whole list of Methodist virtues: but cannot possibly mean art. A good play about a bad man would be a cheerier sign than a bad play about a good man. Mr. Don Marquis' cockroach *archy* is a delight to human beings. The fumblings of our playwrights with heroes, negroes, socialism and the sanctities of the middle class are insignificant altogether.

Indeed, the value of such a play as "Jane Clegg" lay precisely in its lack of good intention. Mr. St. John Ervine is a mediocre artist. But he has the ruthless respect for the objects of his perception which is the beginning of holiness. He wrote in "Jane Clegg" the surface story of two shoddy

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folk: he was humble and simple before the vision of his mind. With the good intention of a Brieux, he would have drawn a moral from his backstairs pair—and fallen. With the good intention of a Tarkington, he would have wrung from them the laughter of a free and conquering land—and the judicious would have wept. “Jane Clegg” stood eminent among last year’s plays. An unlit, un-aspiring testament of a limited man’s honest awareness stood simple among the grandiosities and prostitutions of Broadway, and succeeded. Here surely is a smiling omen.

So also, in a different degree “The Famous Mrs. Fair,” which is still playing at Henry Miller’s Theater. Ten years ago, Mr. James Forbes was writing “The Chorus Lady,” “The Commuters,” “The Traveling Salesman.” Racy products they were of Sardou and slang which howsoever marked a true approach to the stuff of their topical subjects. As a rule, in these earlier plays, the manneristic study gave way after Act One to a complete absorption in Sardou. In “The Famous Mrs. Fair” there is none of the sharp, wild social farce. Mr. Forbes has expressed his comedic situation in highly starched, conventional human terms. But at least he holds to the comedy of character, and develops it, to the end. In “The Traveling Salesman” the author subverted flashing raw colors to the painting of a time-worn picture. In the current play he has become rigidly respectable in his choice of means. He uses the gray shop-water-

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colors of the popular magazines. But he traces a design. Possibly some day he may, holding to his heightened sense of a comedic situation, recapture the verve and tang of his slangier days. There is a true dramatic consequence in the clash which he outlines between the notoriety-seeking Mrs. Fair and the homebody husband who actually does commit adultery and is forgiven out of the wife's awakened sense of sublimated sin. The play indeed—woodenly acted by Mr. Miller and almost too complacently by Miss Blanche Bates as the complacent war-worker—is quite as respectable a performance as the better plays of such French Academicians as Maurice Donnay, Brieux and Henri Lavedan. This is not high praise. The Boulevard theaters and the French Academy have had progressively less, for one hundred years, to do with the French Drama. But at least they make a traditional ruck of competence from which such masters as Henri Becque and Paul Claudel periodically rise.

“The Famous Mrs. Fair” moves into its second year. Now comes a still brighter omen from Mr. Richard Bennett. Mr. Bennett tours America with two plays: a usual bit of British furniture entitled “For the Defence” and Eugene O’Neill’s “Beyond the Horizon.” Crowds come to see O’Neill and leave the other play alone. Mr. Bennett, who took “For the Defence” along presumably to fall back on when he grew weary of “forcing a good play down the public’s throat,” now finds that he has no use for it,

Passage from Limbo

and will ship it, by freight, to the Broadway store-rooms.

It is true that the critics to an extent spoiled the experiment of placing the O'Neill play on Broadway by calling it a tragedy. There is a large pseudo-intellectual public which believes that it cares for tragedy and is hence bound to be pleased by a play that is merely wistfully lyric and which is hailed as tragedy. We need not, however, be too skeptical of our rejoicing in the success of "Beyond the Horizon." It is good work. Its linear technique, which would have been inadequate for tragedy, precisely expresses the vague gropings of the characters: its rambling from scene to scene, from farm to hill-top and to farm, is quite as sensitive a form for the O'Neill search of flat horizons as are the dense complexes of the Ibsen drama for Ibsen's abrupt and profound spiritual encounters. "Beyond the Horizon" is a reaching of wan, weak, white hands from the crass, unfertile American soil upward to far ways, dim places, where is air. It is a gray song of longing. But this is not tragedy. Tragedy is consummation. The O'Neill play is gesture. Tragedy is the vision of the realization of human spirit in its personal overwhelming by universal Law: and the O'Neill play is at best a sort of platonic betrothal in which the poet flutters beside the Flame of Life and is shriveled like a moth. In tragedy the poet is consumed, and becomes Flame. The hero of "Beyond the Horizon" merely falls limp, after a feeble circling, and is dead forever.

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No less is it true that this play, naïve, pure, luminous (although quite chaste of good intention) sang its pale melody among the chatter, the cant, the rantings of Broadway: sang, and was heard. Who knows? With such signs seen and understood, the better time may come. The time when Europe will have to send us other than a literary showman's penny parading of our national hero, deeper than Mr. Ervine's honest study in modern Billingsgate, to dominate a season in New York: the time when Eugene O'Neill will have to give us stronger than his nostalgic and horizontal lyrism in order to stand as high as he does now above his fellow craftsmen. The time may come. At least for us who cannot turn from our devotion to the Theater, it is inspiriting to hope so. . .

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14: *The American Year*

FROM my writing table I look south over the Hudson River. Cherry and plum and peach in bloom throw pelts of colored flame through the warm mist of the sun. The river rolls beside its western wall of palisading blue, down twenty miles within my sight. Here, it turns sharply and is gone. Another twenty miles, I know, and it is flowing free and serene beside the turmoil, beside the shrillness, beside the fevers of New York.

There, millions of men and women live in a constant bout of jostling one another's souls. And among them, hundreds with sharp eyes and reaching minds paw over the mental and vocal products of each other . . . purr or snarl, nestle or claw in an agitation which they are sure sums up the cultural activity of the country.

In a way they are right. New York is the clearing house of the nation's intellectual products. There are other centers of exchange and valuation. But New York leads. If one watches the impact of cliques, the concerts of discordant voices acclaiming and backbiting, the parades of the self-important and the apocalyptic in these professional *bourses* of literary and dramatic and artistic stock—all fairly shoddy, but all glossed with the

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veneer of mode; if one takes note of these ranks of pundits, critics, popes, of these hierarchies of genius and of prophecy, one must recognize by all its sounds and odors the cultural Capital: the Metropolis: the sort of overnervous human complex which doubtless once was Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Rome—and which today is Paris and Berlin.

Add to your list: New York. We are mature. Here are all the intricate trappings of a people truly through a few fine spirits expressing its life and its dream: here are the magazines and forums, the gossip of the salons and journals, the season's cohorts of "great men," the hordes of scribblers, tasters, pickers, literary prostitutes and *vivandières* which must by some ironic ruling of the Muses foregather in shut places—ten thousand strong for each true artist, for each true creator. . . All of which let us accept humbly as the Muses' will, since the true and the clean (at the prescribed ratio) do exist among them.

If one's body of reference (to borrow a phrase from Einstein) be this twirling marketplace, so much happens in a week that your conscientious journalist must dash off a chronicle per day. But in that quiet and serene Domain where the flowers of spirit push slowly since they are to bloom forever, very little happens in a year. Each such flower is the fruition of deep and intricate growth: perhaps the final summing of a lifetime, perhaps the ultimate voice of a generation's social brood-

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ing. One or two such in a year make a rich season, a season crowded with beginnings. And this is our case. Young America, roused from her profound protective Winter, stands at the Spring.

So persuasive is the atmosphere among us of sudden and spectacular buddings, that the hysteria of our literary announcers who discover a new masterpiece every week is to be condoned. Our critics have Spring-fever. They are in love with such new-found words as "literature," "significant" and "great." But the pity of their romantic attitude is that in their bursts of apocalyptic vision they are likely to overlook slighter but true significances in the local crops. I take as an instance the recent novel "Main Street" by Mr. Sinclair Lewis. There are vital symptoms in the appearance and the overwhelming vogue of this fine book. But which of our critics, crying masterpiece, has stopped to note them?

I do not know if the shouts of the acclaim of "Main Street" have yet reached Paris. Mr. Lewis is an intelligent young writer who, in the grips of economic need, for some years made his way by writing sparkling and ephemeral stories for the magazines. The stories brought him very moderate funds and very little standing: also they brought him an accumulated sense of sin—all of which Mr. Lewis, being a gentleman, resented. So a year ago Mr. Lewis "let go." As he put it to a friend: "I have been whoring long enough. I am going to write a book this time *for myself*. And I don't give

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a damn if it sells or if it doesn't!" . . . And the book has sold by the 100,000: and Mr. Lewis has gotten rich—all in result of a mood of protest against the commercializing of his art forced on him by a venal world. Mr. Lewis, in a spirit of purity for once, writes a good book—it brings him the return which his bad tales never did. Mr. Lewis, in a fresh spirit of hatred for America, excoriates the life of the typical American man and woman—he becomes the season's idol of the American world!

Surely, this is a fascinating literary comedy and well worth noting. The book itself is distinguished by its fidelity to detail, its humble devotion to the clear portrayal of surface characters. "Main Street" is the name of the central thoroughfare of tens of thousands of American towns. Mr. Lewis has with the fervor of rebellion etched its portrait. His heroine is our Emma Bovary—passionless, opinionative, prim. She perishes in the even insipidity, the complacent ugliness of her provincial world. But being American, she does not take to her lovers: she tries to reform the town. And in her failure she does not resort to poison: she falls away into a vague and sterile resignation. The artistic value of the book, one feels, is rather unconscious as regards its author. Mr. Lewis takes his heroine's revolts seriously: but her poignance lies really in the fact, splendidly portrayed, that she is very little wiser than the Town she would reform and that her ideals of "culture" are quite

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as absurd as those of her husband or the grocer. Mr. Lewis lavishes his attention on what he believes to be foreground characterization. And yet the book in its entirety gives the æsthetic form of a full and stifling background from which no human beings saliently emerge. This lack of foreground, of *personality*, is American, and Mr. Lewis has unconsciously recorded in it what is perhaps the outstanding feature of American life. The American novelist who stresses the dominant delineation of the person is unconsciously imitating Europe and is doomed to failure.

Now "Main Street," which is compounded of the paprika of protest, has achieved the sort of popularity heretofore judged by the wise men of the world of books to be the privilege of the purveyors of undiluted saccharine—of the most supine flatterers of American complacence. The vogue of the unimaginative sycophants has, however, for many years been declining. Albeit the growing population of the country as a whole assured to these products a creditable sale, a new world has risen in America which detested these adulterated literary bon-bons and would have none of them; which longed for the zest of acute although not too searching criticism in the guise of comedy and satire. It has gone hungry. "Main Street" appears and it comes forth, hungry and avid and articulate at last. The long tottering edifice of infantile pioneer taste falls with a blow and the new structure is revealed—the taste for emotional bitters,

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for the stimulation of running down one's past. The taste that responds to Mr. Lewis is no longer childish, it is adolescent.

I run through the voluminous lists of the year's "important fiction" and find one other work provocative of discussion in the relativity of my especial point of view. "Blind Mice" introduces a new American novelist, Mr. C. Kay Scott. And Mr. Scott with a single stride outranks the great majority of his contemporaries. He may be said to have localized at last High Comedy to the American Scene. William Dean Howells and Henry James essayed comedy in the novel form. But James saw comedy chiefly through the involute gyrations of emotionally alienated people—whence he lapsed, being anything but sensitive, into gross melodrama or the occult. And Howells poised his fugitive designs upon the tender fabric of Bostonian convention—which by rights they should have pierced and illumined and absorbed. Both of these "classics" are writers with whom we may today dispense without umbrage to our literary pride . . . for we have better at last. As we might also with their chief successor, Mrs. Edith Wharton, who adds to her general Jamesian outlook the sense of spiritual drama of a Henry Bernstein.

Mr. Scott has taken for his material an ordinary small Suburban town. He makes of it an intellectual design which will bear comparison for its impregnable form with the no more intellectual patterns of M. André Gide. This is a literary triumph

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of no small size. With true comedic instinct, Mr. Scott's choice of subject is conventional: he limns the moral devastation wrought by a mother-in-law upon her visit in the household of her daughter. He traces his evolving forces with a cool and aloof precision that is Latin rather than Anglo-Saxon. Indeed his mother-in-law irresistibly brings to mind the perhaps richer but not surer creations of French comedy: *Harpagon* or *Tartuffe*. Mr. Scott does not raise his voice. He does not resort to outward climax. He reins his men and women as a composer fulfills the voices of his Fugue, to the logical and abysmal end of their activity. He has written a remarkable book. And he has proven by it that our local society is at last mature to the point of generating within itself the virus of cultivated gently destructive art. "*Main Street*" is the lyrical assault of a hurt romantic mind, by means of sharp photographic portrayal, upon the callow undifferentiated American mass. "*Blind Mice*" is a less large but a profounder performance: the creation and differentiation (by a hurt but intellectually accurate mind) from this same American mass of a true comedic and objective form. The art of Mr. Lewis is unconscious and steals in as an incident to his attack. Mr. Scott is the self-recognized artist in whose observance, since he is sensitive and intellectual, the attack is implicit.

The "lists," however, do show one general advance. There is a beginning of craftsmanship among our novelists and poets. It is clear that

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England during the past generation has possessed a score of novelists who *knew how to write* to every one of our own. It is clear, also, that in the chaos of her unlettered onset America reveals today artistic originality far beyond that of England. Now if the power to express is really to replace our present reliance upon mood and temper as a basis and tradition, there is great chance that the creative impulse of America may produce a lasting cultural expression. The battle, however, is but begun. If the "Belphégor" of Julien Benda were not written from so particularistically French a stand-point I should wish for its wide dissemination among our supposedly artistic classes. For the myth is still rife and virulent among us that the less you know about an art the more likely you are to achieve greatness in it. "If you know how to paint," goes our pseudo-bergsonian rune, "you can't possibly be an artist. But if you don't know how to spell and have never read a book antecedent to H. G. Wells, you have a chance to rival Dostoyefsky." The genesis of this delusion among us—apart from it as a dim reflex response to the already highly documented intuitionism of Bergson—is not hard to find. Our own literary fathers . . Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, etc. . . were all without exception deeply read men, studious scholars in the discipline of expression. But the truth of their example has not been able to prevail against the fallacious syllogism deduced from the world's revolt from dead and bad

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convention. When Courbet and Cézanne rebelled against the false academy of France they had the live traditions of French art upon which to base their rebellion. When Wagner and Nietzsche uprose against the dead conventions of the little German courts they took their nutriment in the vital Teuton tradition of expression. And when Arnold Schoenberg rebelled against the school of Wagner he did the same. When we Americans rebel against the hideous dogmas of our academies and schools we have no live tradition to fall back on. Wherefore we deduce from our false premise that the bad tradition comprises all tradition: and that, since the slogan of craftsmanship is raised most vociferously by defunct schools, *all* craftsmanship leads to the defunct in art.

In France, Dadaism is in the hands of men saturate in the discipline of a cultural tradition. However wide apart in doctrine, a Louis Aragon and an André Gide are brothers in their instinctive sense of the mental overseership of all true expression. But in America, even traditionalism is in the hands of savages. And the potential classical tradition of Whitman, Hawthorne, Emerson and Poe remains unharvested. These men become, for a chaotic rootless world, the precedents of chaos.

Our traditionalists have no background: knowing nothing about life they are equipped no better to interpret the art of yesterday than to induce the art of tomorrow. Our artistic anarchists—they who shout loudest for freedom—precisely be-

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cause they lack the basis of a true tradition of original expression fall invariably into slavish imitation of some late or early Continental form. The situation is not without its humor. Our traditionalists may imitate Tennyson, Dickens or Anacreon: but equally our liberals imitate Wells and Bennett, our radicals imitate some accessible English derivation of Flaubert, Schnitzler, Rimbaud or Verlaine. The law that life in art as in biology is a strict process of nutriment and growth has failed them. So that, in lieu of feeding rightly to the end of building up an individual tissue, they gorge by hazard and destroy the tissue they were born with. America is full today of Dionysiac creators who with astounding pyrotechnical display give to a somehow unastonished world feeble and wooden models of the traditional work of the Nineteenth Century of Europe.

That our marts of emotional exchange should be full of these is nothing. What is more serious perhaps is the subservience of our critics to such gusts of mode. The artist with little knowledge may be impotent to rival the sculpture of the Mayas or the pottery of Peru, but he can still record an uncertain lyrical afflatus. The critic of little knowledge can record only his own incomprehensions. America numbers today a few critics of good taste. But even among these a negligible fraction are equipped with that needed double weapon of the functioning critic: consciousness of background and valiance of utterance in the contemporary field. Even of

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the few who have a conviction of what lies between æsthetic form and the dimensionless caressing vapors of mode and mood which go by the name of literature and art, how many are there who feel moved to incur the harry and odium and risk of controversy? This familiar sport of the European critic is almost unknown in the United States where the critics who *know* are for the most part too timid to *avow*.

I should say . . . to get back to my subject . . . that a bloom of assertive ignorance concerning art and letters is the accompanying social and critical flourish to America's emergence today from a pre-cultural to a cultural stage. Art is the normal process of response by a self-conscious, self-measured society to its own life and growth. It flowers only in fields highly charged and richly fertilized. (Witness for instance the compact social unity of the classic Amerinds, of ancient Egypt and Judea, of Athens, of minutely integrated India, of the late Mediæval Church, of modern France.) The creative faculties of the artist require discipline: require, that is, a constant confrontation with the experience of life as it is translated to his plane by custom, religion, history, critical and social pressure. The first man was not an artist. The subjective energies of man become articulate and full of meaning only by rigorous contact with the objective energies of men. America today is as full of wistful creative impulse as a Spring wood is full of little flowers.

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But in the period of formation that awaits us, I long for a more inspired critical leadership, a more intelligent critical mold than I now see. I long for someone of the stature of a Lessing or a Brandes. . . That with the knowledge and the power to sustain our load, we may go forward into birth.

(But here I am filling what should be a chronicle of births with my opinions. Well: that trait also is a message from America. America loves opinion. America recognizes no art that is not the carrier of opinion. The popularity of Bernard Shaw among us is explained by that. Shaw was an inspired farce-writer rotted by Puritanical conviction. He should have been born in Nebraska. He is very close, æsthetically, to Mr. Bryan. And now, Sinclair Lewis . . “Main Street” is a marvelous example of the novel of opinion. So, by the way, are the works of H. G. Wells, who is an American journalist accidentally born in London.)

To return, however. . . The creator in America is unassisted. He lacks no praise, he lacks no abuse. But the praise he gets is silly and the disagreement he encounters is irrelevant and feeble. It is almost impossible for an artist or a thinker in America to give answer to, or derive help from, his critics, because of the low level and the insolidity of the material directed against him. And yet he presses on. Even our Theater has now revealed a vital figure.

Eugene O'Neill for several years was the hero of

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our "little theaters," in particular of the Provincetown Players who have given native plays with an enthusiastic verve little fortified by any knowledge or instinct of the Theater. And yet they are justified in time, since they did house O'Neill until O'Neill outgrew them. Last season O'Neill graduated to Broadway, timidly, by way of some special matinées of his drama "Beyond the Horizon." In short time the matinées evolved into a regular run: the O'Neill play came to dominate the professional New York season and after its engagement in New York it toured the country. It was a lyric drama, technically tragic but brushed in with broad wide luminous lines of a romantic sort: lines equivalent to the author's sprawling sense of drama and to the inchoate yearnings of his hero—a New England farmer, harnessed to a drudge, who neglects his soil in order to dream weak dreams of Brazilian sea-boards and typhoons. Of course, the critics, hailing the play as a great tragedy, misjudged it. They had by last year discovered the ways of Ibsen. They therefore assumed that O'Neill must be trying to write an Ibsen drama. They measured his work by the Scandinavian's scheme of perpendicular descent. They failed to see the significant because distinctly American horizontalism of O'Neill. This year, O'Neill produced a fantastic idyl of terror entitled "Emperor Jones." His hero is again a poet nostalgic of far horizons: in this case an American negro, a graduate sleeping-car porter who by filibuster wins a risky ascendancy over the

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native blacks of a Caribbean isle. The play traces in a series of sharp scenes the destructive inroads upon his Imperial strength of the old negro fears and superstitions. It shows remarkable intellectual imagination. Mr. O'Neill has the conceptions of a true dramatist. But his work is marred, so far, by the careless manner in which it is composed. Here is true sense of drama: but O'Neill does not work hard and deep enough to impregnate his dialogue with it. His plays read badly. The glow of creative temperament never quite flushes the texture of his words. If Eugene O'Neill does not win a greater sense of the importance of his own ideas and a surer knowledge of their mere potentiality, they will be squandered year after year in half-realized productions.

I have forgotten the poets. I hear, among them, one clear voice which should have been noted in my book. Let me now correct the omission. . . A number of years ago, an Australian girl, born in Dublin, Ireland, drifted across the world to New York and made her living in the sweatshops and factories of our East Side. She emerged. In her two books of poems, "The Ghetto" and "Sun-up," she gives the record of her experience. The pictures of Miss Lola Ridge are etched deep in her own mind. And to her mind, the Ghetto of New York is exotic. It may be real: it may be realer than any other picture in her life: it is doubtless beautiful. But the plate upon which it has eaten out its poignant lines is after all a sensory intelligence not

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formed in the American world—the intelligence, subtle, tender and wistful, of the Celt. And yet the record upon her Celtic mind of Jewish life is authentically American, precisely in the hiatus between the subject and the object. In this distinction, in this distinguishing element of surprise and distance between the artist and his world, Miss Ridge makes contribution to the rich field of American imagination. We have here a poetic equation between Celt and Jew that is unique.

Miss Ridge's lapidic prosody constrains the luscious streams of Jewish pathos into hard, clear crystal. One feels here the agony, spiritual and material, of the transplanted Jew: but always one feels it through the amazement of the poet. She is forever a traveler within her subject.

At the antipode are such stories as those of Miss Anzia Yezierska, a young Russian Jewish immigrant who after still longer years in the East Side sweatshops has come at last to authorship and to expression. I cite these tales, not because their intrinsic literary value warrants my singling them out, but because of the contrast they afford to the fine work of Miss Ridge. For Miss Yezierska has what Miss Ridge lacks. In her book, "*Hungry Hearts*," the Ghetto is not exotic, it is home: it is not sharply outlined in the perspective of removal, it is a congeries of swirling plaints, of parabolic and undifferentiate yearnings. It lacks surface, it is overweighted with the gross primary colors, the gross minor melodies of subconscious life. And yet

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in these very faults, it reveals a richness which is a splendid promise.

In Miss Ridge's pictures, although they are brilliantly objective, one feels too heavily the spiritual and æsthetic remoteness of the author. In Miss Yezierska's, one misses the delineating surface of conceptual image which is after all the token of permanence in art. Some one must yet arise in our language who, with a quality akin to Miss Ridge's delineative power, yet possesses the temperamental affinity of Miss Yezierska to her lowly subjects. Then, at last, the turbulent Israels and Italies and Russias and Syrias and Balkans of New York will find their definite place—before they disappear—in the surviving universe of letters. . .

POSTSCRIPT

Certain details in this paper which may seem redundant to the American reader are explained by the fact that I was in this instance writing only for a public in Germany and France.

Toward the end of the essay, there occurs this sentence: "I have forgotten the poets." A very true sentence. It was a bad habit of mine. One of which I was guilty in "Our America." What right had an American interested in literature in 1919 to forget Alfred Kreymborg and William Carlos Williams? Fortunately for me, these poets and others, have since that date kept on composing and growing. Until at last even I grew aware of them. I'll prove it to them, some day.

15: *Charlie Chaplin*

IN him a world weary with posturings of death has the brief benison of life free of all elaborations. Mechanical advance is elaboration. It is ignoble for it is so many steps from source. It soils pain, bans flowers and trees, complicates song, blurs faith. Now in the glitter of a toy thrown up in the glut of this elaboration . . . in the screen . . . a little man whom the Man in all men greets since he is very like, in elemental straightness, to our pain and our song, to the flowers and trees that we have crowded out.

The antics of this sprite trill like young leaves in a fresh East wind, cool from the dawn. The antics of this sprite are meaningless and eternal. That is why we love him: because there sings in him a great indifference to the groaning structures of our world. That is why he has meaning: because he stands immune, even in his calamities immune, from the prone chaos of our dead significances.

Children are nearest him: because they do not seek to understand this wisdom that is theirs of immediate acceptance. They also have not lost the magic of making: have not begun to shuffle, with all their lame minds are worth, away from life.

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Theirs is the vision of blindness. His is the blindness of vision.

Elaborations, institutions, codes. Morals, heroisms, duties. Here is a solitary a-dance against you all. And that he comes in the shrill of celluloid and the stink of chemicals, upon the ugly clatterwave of headlines and of posters . . what is this paradox but life again, persisting and insoluble, the magic Grain that all our laws and all our herds have not ground down.

Your elaboration is a Bank; how it weighs on us, polishes and breaks us! Chaplin's fluid protest utters the negation of banks. Your elaboration is a theater: Chaplin flinging creamtarts tears its deadness alive into a tattered, quivering design. Your elaboration is a pawnshop, a prison, a department store, a slum, a banal love affair, a hideously insignificant war. Your elaboration has become our world, this congeries of accumulated errors (error is elaboration) which, calling it society or state, we make to possess us till we are choked with its dust, dirtied with its grime and under it altogether.

Now here this salient figure weaving the sweet destruction of laughter. Creature of our elaboration, making of details the strains of a new song: making its error mother of a truth.

Bank falls, city slum, battle and state die all away for a glittering instant. Millions of men and women win at a moment respite from the load of all men's and women's toil. In the dark theater

Charlie Chaplin

hall, they dare, before this sharp assertion of a soul unfleshed by custom, to know their soul. Their minds have no name for such simplicity: their minds can destroy only what they can name. Civilization in a million minds topples before this wistful and anarchic spirit which, in park and trench, in parlor and church, is always one, impenetrably one, and obdurate like an atom against the will of the world, which is forever breaking Man into a soldier, a citizen, a gentleman or an outcast. A little man with great big feet: a Mask. And beneath it life steals in. Down go bank and shop, gentleman and lady . . . in the dark. Life licks naked and cleansing like a flame . . . an instant . . . in the dark.

In ages of health men call forth spirits beyond them: in ages of dearth, spirits behind them. Out of young strength loom Prometheus and Isaiah. For this chill aftermath of blood and steel excess, the slim shoot of Chaplin. But frail howsoever, do not mistake him for weak. What is so full alive (when there are cities to consume) as a little dancing flame? What measure is so terrible against skyscrapers as the slim grass that grows?

Wisdom like the wisdom of a flower. It does not defend itself. Person like the body of a flower. Untouched by assertion. Chaplin is defended by the screen from the destruction of speech. Genius is that which grows great in narrowness: which makes a word of the mysterious Silence.

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But the old men were right and God is a jealous God. He creates no thing that He does not destroy. Herein His diapason. Herein the proof of His oneness. If He creates the spark of life and does not instantly devour it, He is usurped. Watch Him now. . .

A world dry-throated and blear in the filth of its elaborations. A world riddled by its elaborations. A world mocked and undone by its machine. Now a creature of the machine mocking the machine and succoring the world. Good. But wait. The circle rounds. The world, won by the joy of its frail savior, makes of its homage a machine to win him!

. . . I see a young tree dance in a sunny wind within the city walls. The walls are glad of the sun on the dancing leaves. They are lit by the sun of gladness. The walls dance. In gratitude and joy, they crowd upon the dancing tree, they dance upon it heavily, they kill it. . . That is the fame of the little man and the pathos of gratitude. A jealous God devours, that he may abide by His children.

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16: *A Note on the Novel*

To the incidental character of the novel as a reflection of life we give great care; to its essential nature as a contribution to life we bring ignorance and neglect.

How would we regard the critic who judged El Greco, Rembrandt, the African woodcarver by their conformance with a set of rules of anatomy and geometry textbooks? Would we not say: the artist who creates by means of physical forms needs knowledge of physical laws, knowledge of physical structure. For it is of these materials that he articulates his vision and his form. But he is an artist insofar as he has a vision and a form. His knowledge of muscles, torsos, limbs, of spatial quantities is his knowledge of *means*. If we wish to know endogenously about muscles, torsos, limbs, we do not go to the artist . . . although we may go to men who have learned vastly from artists. And if we wish to understand intelligently the particular use which the particular artist makes of such matters, we must learn first what the artist wants to say and determine by that measure if he has used them well.

The novelist's need of individual and social psychology is a pretty good analogue to the plastic

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artist's need of physical forms: the novelist's use of customs, manners, institutions, creeds, is kin to the plastic artist's use of the ways of mass and space. How comes it then that we think we have struck to the heart of the nature and reason of a novel when we discuss its psychological correctness (its verisimilitude with our own idea of certain men and women) or its awareness of certain social problems?

Of course, there is reason for this, but it is not as some of us doubtless would be pleased to have it, that this is a "scientific age." "Even in our fiction," to quote the imaginary professor, "we look for serious discussion of fact and of truth." To whom I make reply: "In your fiction, you look for corroborating statements of your own particular brands of fact and truth—brands put up from previous creative contributions: which is quite another matter." It is not scientific nor conducive to the advantage of science, to judge a novel in terms let us say of its "psychological accuracy" or of its "faithful reflection of social reality." For to do this is to accept as an Absolute Measure of accuracy and faithfulness the rationalized data of previous creators or groups of creators; and thereby to hinder the continuity of man's contribution to reality of experience which is, from the scientific standpoint, part of the function of creative art. Here as elsewhere the gap between science and art is truly the gap between false science and bad art. To be scientific about art is to be æsthetic about it.

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Nor is it necessary to go back to Aristotle. Enough, as regards that very great man's *Æsthetic*, to say that his meaning in the phrase "Imitation of nature" was determined by a positive and common animistic understanding of nature which included primarily the dynamic principle of the individual will and which most of us moderns lack: and that it was limited by an ignorance of the processes of the human Psyche which was excusable in Aristotle but is less excusable in Mr. Babbit. . .

Let us skip to the nineteenth century. German Romanticism and French Romanticism, by respective metaphysical and æsthetic methods, brought new sentient worlds to the use of the evolving will of Europe. The hierarchic stuffs so satisfactory to Shakespeare, Montaigne, Racine, no longer served the creator. So Romanticism ordered *Receptivity to Material*. All fields, all worlds, all "realities" . . . from the innermost ego to the farthest sea . . . became the stuff of expression. Despite the complexity of this and the intricate relation of the artist and the group, one can say directly enough that to the novelist this meant a simple thing: here once more was adequate material whereby he could express himself. The creator was as ever active and dynamic. The material, at least in the ultimate process toward art, was fuel, symbol, means—anything but end. Now, after the creative act, came the Program. Balzac assured us that he was Secretary to Society.

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Flaubert vowed that from his works the least personal taint had been excised. Zola and the Goncourt brothers discoursed on Darwin whom they never understood and framed the Naturalist novel which they never wrote. For Balzac was the opposite of social secretary: he was the creator of dense organic forms to the making of which he kneaded the "life" of France as the baker kneads flour. Flaubert, as weak an analyst as ever gained fame for being a great one, was a pure and powerful *intuitif*: he was a true progenitor of imagism and of cubism: he made of *Emma Bovary*, *Salammbô*, *Saint Anthony* and *Frédéric Moreau* successive expressionistic forms of his own uncomfortable state in France. Only the disciples of Zola, whose names we forget, wrote Naturalist novels according to the program. And the trouble with them lay not with a program good or bad: it lay with their own lack of creative power.

Now, during the propaganda periods of Romanticism, when *receptivity to fresh material* was a point to be fought for, the terms realist and naturalist as indicating acceptance of the romantic attitude had meaning. The fresh material of the romanticist became the reality of the realist. The realists, later the naturalists, were they who espoused and practiced the romanticist æsthetic. Correctly, therefore, realist and romanticist were one: and during the romanticist period alone did the word realism, applied to the novel, have sense as a defining term. Moreover, in those rare cases

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where the romanticist will for new-worlds-to-conquer begot the finality of a new-conquered-world (a true work of art), the romanticist-realist ended in classicism. His work was classic. The whole lot of opponent terms equated into zero.

Never are these terms with their old connotations heard today in France and Germany where they were born. They are still with us, where they are merely borrowed. Outside of this technical and relative meaning about which most of us are as ignorant as we are of the æsthetic schools of Egypt, realism as referred to art and the novel is as senseless a term as has ever been picked up from a junk shop. Every artist that has lived in the world is a realist insofar as himself is real and as his material, determined by himself and the world, must be real also. But no artist conceivable to man can be a realist in the sense of our critical implication—the sense of an absolute reality which true scientists would not arrogate to mathematics and certainly not to man. “It is the highest glory of man,” said Remy de Gourmont, “that there is no science of man.” Our standard of reality is an accumulating, gyrating and disappearing flux of subjective contributions. If there is a science of man, its name is æsthetics, and its axiom: that each new contribution shall be gauged by the inner law of its own genesis. And here is an axiom that does away with ninety-nine one-hundredths of our “intelligent comment” on novels that create characters and discuss conditions “true to life.”

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What happens to us is simple. Receptivity to material was a *means* for the creation of the nineteenth century Epic—an Epic which I am convinced is still in the pre-Homeric stage. That receptivity we have made into an *End*. The Continental Europeans are indefatigable program-makers. They made a program of the liberating process of the nineteenth century novel. We use that program like pedantic children to measure our own works and give them meaning: with the result that we rob them of what meaning they have. Meantime in Europe, they have twentieth century novels—and twentieth century programs whereby to gauge them.

Program-making is a vital part of the process whereby the social body more or less assimilates those new experiences and forms of life which are literature and art. But program-making must start from a recognition of the extra-intellectual nature of creation. The intellect does not create, it measures and brings up what it apprehends. The value of imaginative literature, even pragmatically as *nourishment to life*, lies in the fact that it creates what the intellect—theory, program, *a priori* standards of good, bad, right and wrong—does not as yet possess. For the intellect possesses what was created *before*. Hence contemporary art can never fall within the scope of pre-existing programs. And to judge the novel—its value as a contribution to literature and life—on the basis of any given psychological or documentary measure

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of fact, truth, reality and the like, is irrelevant and absurd.

This formulated problem of scope and theory concerns the novelist only indirectly: only insofar as he is affected by the critic who, rationalizing his work on the basis of the work itself or on the basis of some forbear's work, either aids or clogs the process of assimilating the novelist's contribution to the sum of social experience. Let the novelist think that he is primarily concerned with socialism, housing problems, psycho-analysis and the like. If he is an artist, his thinking will be but a detail of his work; and if he is not an artist his work will be but a negligible detail of his thinking. "From the beginning to the end," wrote Cervantes, "Don Quixote is an attack on the romances of chivalry." With this mouse of a program he produced his mountain of an epic, because he was a mountain—a veritable sea and mountain—of a man. The æsthetic value of any novel is the end-product of its related elements of life. The novelist who deals with, and relates into organic form, elements of life, with whatever intellectual conviction, may create Beauty if he has that virtue in him. But the novelist who tries to deal directly with Beauty, get at it directly, short-cutting the elements of life, is doomed. The artist in the act of creation can afford to be anything rather than an æsthete.

But the critic and the public—let them look to their ways! Let them cease from studying a means

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as the End. Let them cease from parroting decayed programs. Let them not think that they praise it . . when they have discussed its "psychology" and its "documentary material." (The term "psychological novel" has less meaning than the term "physiological oil-painting.")

We have a few true creators, capturers of organic form—which is another term for life—from the hinterlands at which mankind rekindles its fires and forges its tomorrows. And we have the perennial Mass—passive, indolent, like a woman fond of reflections, hostile to all *contributions*, since they mean renewal, effort, change. Which will the American critic serve: the dross of the Mass which is the Mass itself, or the spirit of the Mass which is the artist?

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I might have expressed better even in so few words my meaning as regards Aristotle. The Greeks by "imitation of nature" or fidelity to nature never dreamed to imply imitation of current facts or fidelity to details of current life. To them art and literature dealt with essences and these essences and forms were so clearly aloof from facts that they deemed an archaic language and mythical subjects the best means for their achievement. In their strict separation of the body and forms of art from the phenomena of actuality they would have been amazed at the modern positivist debauch-

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ery of their precepts into a defense of realism or naturalism. To Aristotle, essential subjective forms were closer to Nature than any copy of fact or manners could possibly be.

17: *A Thought on the Photograph*

VENTUALLY the distinction that separates photography from the more subjectively attained means of expression, which in case of intense crystallization becomes known as Art, may disappear. A powerful man's control of the camera machine and of the material apprehended by his mind as objective and external and to be fused into a subjective concept may become such that he can achieve through them an essential fusion equal in symbol-value and in its provocation of ecstasy to much that goes unquestioned as art. Once only poetry could become art, not prose. The whole classical tradition of æsthetic excluded the factual domain. Homer, Æschylus, Aristotle, regarded as material for art only an essentialized conventionalized Past World, that they believed had never been in fact. The human spirit that in those days was unable to make æsthetic form, let us say, from the contemporary life of a village peasant, later won that power. Today, the human spirit, working through men like Stieglitz and Strand, lifts the significance of the details of a human face into a momentary articulation of the subjective will that a machine can capture and sustain.

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The work of Stieglitz is more than half upon his subject and this fact brings clearer the old intuitive mechanism. By talk, atmosphere suggestion and the momentum of a personal relationship, Stieglitz lifts the features and body of his subject into a unitary design that his plate records. His work in thus *moulding* material is analogous to the work of any good portraitist, who does his moulding in his eye and with his hand on canvas. It is an equally intuitive and meta-conscious act. And similarly (as with the "inspiration" of the painter) when the subject is fused to a response with Stieglitz the photograph is good; otherwise it is dead (like, for that matter, the majority of paintings).

This is a suggestion of how photography may possibly become significant by the deep unity of its methods with those of any "art." A man's hand is a phylogenetic acquisition. The camera may later be regarded in a domain of which the biological is a mere dimension as an Organ also created and controlled by will.

This, however, is sure: the man who believes that what we call Art today limits the infinitude of possible means for the achievement of the ecstasy of art is a barbarian. Stieglitz's work may be close in the pattern of analogous perspectives to that of the first man who articulated music with his vocal chords, or who guided in his half-strange hand a flint across a slab of slate.

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I speak of but a single aspect of Stieglitz's work, and of one which applies scarcely at all to the significant performances of Paul Strand and Sheeler. Stieglitz's studies of trees, clouds, nature morte of all sorts, transcend my discussion altogether. Stieglitz has caught æsthetic form in his instantaneous reports of natural objects. And this is a fact for which I am tremendously grateful, since it will help me some day to demonstrate my theory of æsthetic, of which intimations are rather loosely scattered through this volume.

1923

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18: *From a Talk at the Greenwich Village Theater*

IT is Midnight. A blizzard is sheeting down from the North through the plains of Minnesota. And we are all in the smoking car of a train pushing up against the wind and the night and the snow. Now, let's look about us at this car we're in, and let's express what we know. You'll see at once that we may go about this in two ways. We may take the car itself as the limit of the world, since it defines indeed the limits of our physical senses. The car is stationary then. It isn't moving at all. That front seat is always just so far from my seat: the drinking water spigot in the rear is always just so far behind. Whatever movement there is, whatever drama and event, must take place strictly and absolutely within the physical stationary form which is the *final real thing* and which I call the car. Overhead, the signal cord swings steadily from side to side. The car is still but the cord swings. That is all there is to know about *that*. From time to time, a surge goes through the car tending mysteriously like gravitation to lurch the passengers forward. Accom-

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panying this lurch there are certain fixed phenomena. The doors at the car's end are thrust open: a gust of chill pours into our hot air. There's a grinding noise under our feet that some dreamer might call the clamping of brakes on wheels: but since there are no brakes or wheels in the car, of course that is sheer nonsense. There's a grinding noise: and that's absolutely all there is to know. Through the open doors, certain of the car's inhabitants pass out: one might say they die for they pass out forever. Other persons come in: one might say they are born, for they've never been in *the car* before—and hence strictly speaking, scientifically speaking, they have been *nowhere* before. There are certain fixed characteristics about these new-born persons. They've got a white cold dust over their coats and hats, they've got little silver spikes sticking in their moustaches, they've got faces red and moist, and one can see their breath. But they settle down, the doors bang to: there's some more of the grinding noise and another gravitational surge through the stationary car urging the passengers for a moment backward. The newcomers grow up quickly to be like the rest of the car's inhabitants. The white dust and the silver spikes disappear . . . they are warm. They are citizens of the eternal stationary world of the car. And of course, there's mystery enough *outside*: in the Void whither each must pass out in his time and whence come the new-born, from Non-existence, to take their places.

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Now . . . that's one way to describe your travel at night in a smoking car through a Minnesota Blizzard. That's the realistic way. Certain clear-eyed and dogmatic gentlemen will point out to you that there's nothing else to know . . . nothing else to see and hear and smell . . . and hence there's nothing else to say. "Use your senses, they'll adjure you. You've been sitting in this car long enough. Have you seen it budge? You've looked at the windows. What's outside? Blackness . . . occasional lights that pass away always in one direction. The car's the world. The car's the important thing. Now if you must write stories about our life . . . to while away the time we can't spend in such important matters as filling our pipes and playing poker, why see to it that you *stick to the facts*. If your tale measures up to the reality of the car, we may have some respect for it."

But there's a small bunch of queer ones in this car. And they see something different: and they see it too *inside the car*. Don't forget that . . . always and eternally *inside* the car and inside the persons sitting inside the car.

The passengers, coming in with their cold faces and their white coats, have brought with them a vast white plain studded with little towns that the snow muffles like a vast white Hand. They have brought with them the vision of a little lighted string of pushing cars moving up, moving up through the black . . . and threading the towns to-

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gether and making a circulation between the towns so that the towns flow into each other and are one. And here's the amusing thing that the little train does and that lives right there inside our very car! At each town it stops and takes a bit of the town and mixes it up with all the other towns it has stopped at, and with all the other towns that the passengers carry already in their heads. And at each particular town, it deposits bits of all the other towns, ere it passes along. It is concocting two surprising brews as it pushes, pushes. One of the brews is outside our car, one is inside. What a brew it is! More intoxicating than the mightiest punch bowl if you only know how to drink it. The blizzard's in it . . . every man brings a particular bit of the blizzard. A hundred towns are in it . . . all brewed together. That man brings a lumbering town: this one brings a mining town: yonder's a wheat-farm. There is a salesman from Chicago and he brings Chicago. We are a bit of New York . . . and with us skyscrapers, subways, libraries, symphony orchestras, Roman satires and Hebrew rhapsodies merge with tall pines, deep coal shafts, wide fields gold with corn: with the jazz of the slick guy from Chicago selling pianolas, with the sweep of the drifting snow. . . But that's only a beginning . . . that's but half of the first taste. In the head of each passenger there's an intricate personal history, and this comes into the car just as surely as the head does. Women and children come with each man's head

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and heart inside the car. Passion and lust and pathos, song and vision . . live there, dance there. Myriad pasts come into the car: Europe, Africa, Asia, crowd in our little car: myriad dreams, myriad tomorrows. And all merge with the towns of Minnesota, with the Canadian snows driving through Minnesota. It is the world, it is the universe, it is God that lives . . within our car pushing through Minnesota.

Now that's not the realistic way to go about describing our car. You can take your choice.

If you'll think of the term *realistic* you'll see that it implies comparison with something else: that the thing so-called is not real in itself but is like something which is real. An imitation pearl may be realistic: a real pearl is simply a pearl. A thing that is real is a thing that **ANSWERS FOR ITSELF**: exists by itself. To be realistic is to be like something real, to be **REAL** is simply **TO BE**. A tree is real because it is a tree. It would be a pretty poor tree we had to verify by comparison with aught outside itself. A woman is real not because she's like Sally, but because she is herself. Now, a work of Art is quite as real a thing as a woman or a tree. Art is real when it answers for itself: and because it has laws and bones and measures of its own existence. It is so **REAL** indeed that it outlasts the highest tree and it wins more lovers than the fairest woman. And when **ART** gets so feeble, so anæmic, so **FALSE** that we must compare it to something else, then

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it is realistic . . and it is damned poor art. To what are you going to liken "Don Quixote," or Job or a Gothic Cathedral? Does not the Idiot of Dostoyefsky bear a similar relation to us poor fools, that a vast redwood tree does to a toothpick? The "Gargantua" of Rabelais, the "Lilliput" of Swift, the Italy of Stendhal, the Saint Anthony of Flaubert are **REAL** in the sense that a Cathedral is real, in the sense that they **ARE**. They are all built superficially by means of matter of fact materials —stone and wood and glass, or human traits and social customs. But they are unrealistic if by realism you mean that you're going to find Quixotes fighting windmills in La Mancha, Jobs holding property in the Land of Uz, or Rheims Cathedrals lying about in the native state in the quarries of Champagne.

Let's get back to our symbolic Car. The **REALISTIC** method of knowing that car is the method of the newspapers . . and it will be satisfactory to that portion of the car's inhabitants who find their comfort in **KNOWING AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE**: in reducing their knowledge to the exact demands of the moment and of their appetites. (These are the more reasonable persons, doubtless. But they don't spend their afternoon listening to folks like me, and you do . . so you are not their sort.) You are the sort to whom that marvelous stormy night and a thousand cities and a thousand pasts and dreams and dramas come within the car. Now, they've got to come in some

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shape, haven't they? That shape is Art. Think of Quixote: he's an invasion of just that sort in the shut car of Spain. Job is an invasion of just that sort. Dante's poem is an invasion of that sort, into the brittle life of Italy. Dostoyefsky is such an invasion. A great Church is such an invasion standing above the shops and markets of its town. The existence of such works among us is like the miraculous incarnation in our humble car of all the world, of all the passion and all the vision of the world. If you compare this lordly invasion to a leather seat or to a water faucet, then it is simply not for you—and the leather seat and the water faucet are.

Now most of our fiction is of the shoddy imitation sort that can get notice only . . like an imitation pearl . . by being compared with something which it is not. It is no invasion of the world and of God into our little car. Oh, no: it is born right inside there . ~~and~~ and the best it hopes for is to be told that it is very like a water faucet or a leather seat.

The best of terms are a dangerous tool. To the imaginative and harmonious Greek, Aristotle's term "Imitation of Nature" was a discipline and a corrective. To the anæsthetic Romans, it became a curse. So the term "realism" has been degenerated and debauched by the anæsthetic Anglo-Saxons. The term as I have used it doesn't fit Balzac: creator of Louis Lambert, of the Wild Ass's Skin, of Vautrin, of a thousand *real* inva-

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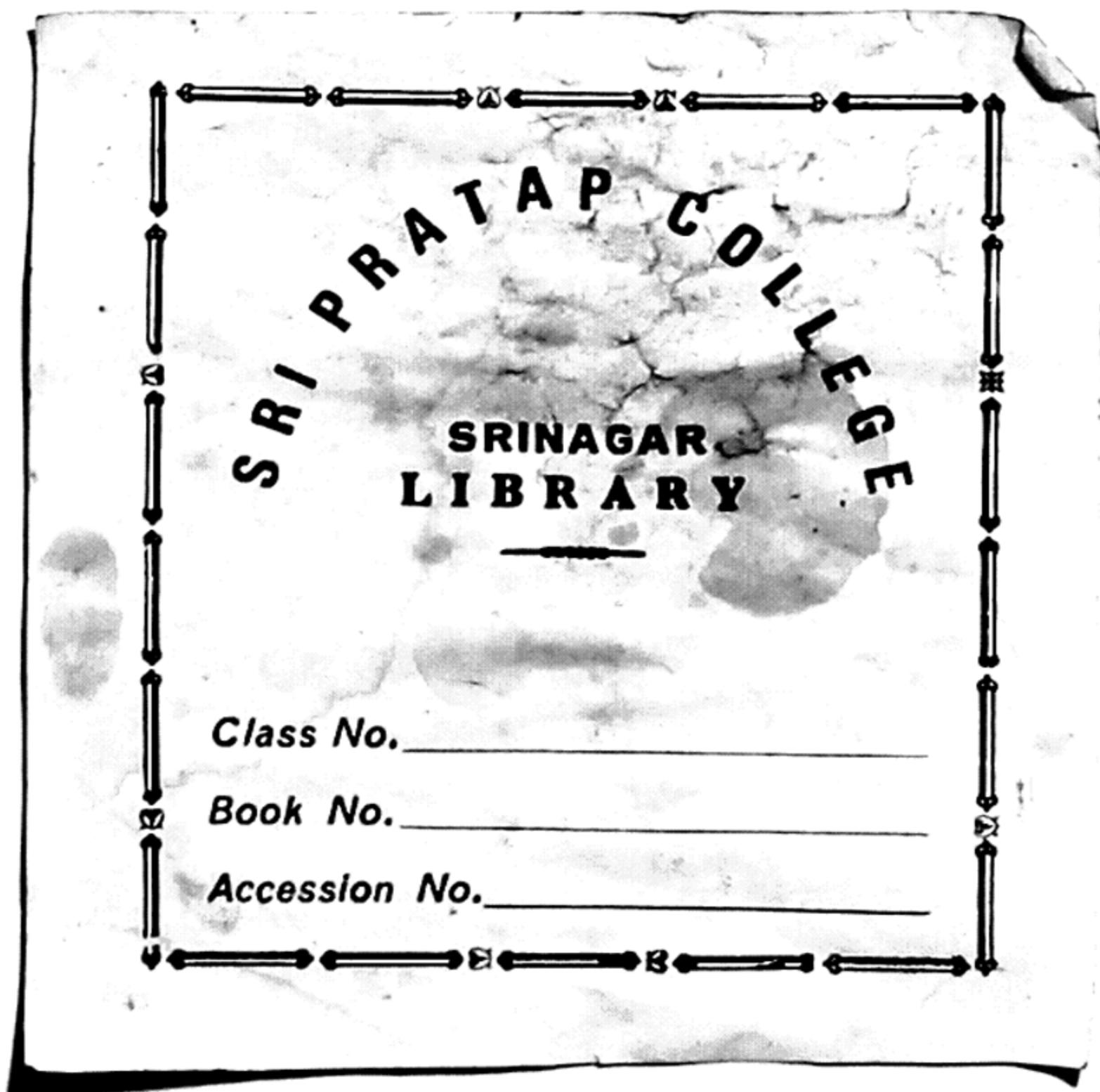
sions into the fact of France. It doesn't apply to Stendhal, the conjurer of *Julien Sorel* or of that perennially fresh *Sanseverina*. It doesn't apply to the Flaubert of the "Sentimental Education," of "The Temptation of Saint Anthony." It applies only to the lesser Russians. But it applies indeed to that London Siegel-Cooper of "seconds" and "shod-dies": Charles Dickens: and to Mr. H. G. Wells whom I have heard called a novelist when he is really nothing but the trainman who calls out the Next Station, and whose books are time-tables more or less up to date . . . and most certainly not Art.

Flaubert cried out that he'd like to burn every copy in existence of his "Madame Bovary" in order that folks might pay some attention to his master-pieces. What would he have liked to do with the feeble spawn of crawling blind invertebrate novels that folk take seriously now?

I know what he'd have done if he'd been living in New York. In his need of something **REAL** in art, he'd have left the novels alone: He'd have gone to the Vaudeville and seen Fanny Brice. Her Yiddish Indian isn't realistic, but he'd have found her **REAL**. He'd have gone to the movie and seen Charlie Chaplin. Charlie's version of a brick-layer would not be found realistic by Mr. Scott Nearing or Karl Marx . . but he'd have found him real. Vision, Drama, Passion, Power, Song . . these are some of the real ingredients of Art. These are some of the means by which the Universe,

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by which God enters the life of our cramped human car. May they not always be banished among us to the vaudeville and the movies. May they appear in our novels.



19: *Dickens Revisited*

IN my father's library one corner was darker than the rest. Here stood a chair whose back was the embrace of two contorted dragons. A red upholstered slip protected you when you sat. But when you crawled into the corner by the books, the black dragons snarled at you unhindered. On the low shelves of this retreat stood three regiments of books that beckoned to me brightly. One, in buff uniform, gold shielded, was Sir Walter Scott: one in muddier brown, equally gilded, was Dickens: the third, great clumsy fellows dressed in green, was Thackeray. At Thackeray's side, George Eliot stood at attention. But she did not entice me in those days: nor has she since. I remember she too was uniformed in green. Later she and Thackeray were dismissed as a trifle shoddy in favor of new leather-back sets bearing the same names but with a hard metallic arrogance that kept them for me in the rôle of strangers.

When I was ten I said to my father: "I want to read Dickens, Thackeray and Scott." "Very well," said he. "Read Scott first: then Dickens: end with Thackeray."

That winter, I read perhaps a score of the Waverley novels. I read little else (including les-

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sons). The following winter I read Dickens: I omitted but one volume, "The Child's History of England," as obviously not meant for me. In my thirteenth year I prepared for a similar conquest of Thackeray. I had made mine a majority of his novels when a cataclysm hurled me myriad leagues and æons from those shelves. The cataclysm was Tolstoi, Ibsen and Balzac. For a month or two my vagrant eyes and absent appetite worried my mother. I read "Hedda Gabler," understood not a word of it in reason, but was anchored by it in a tumultuous fog. "War and Peace" I kept parcelled in a drawer with my underwear and read at night when I was supposed to sleep. My mind, focussed to its gigantic Russian scope, left me to stumble on such tiny things as a household or a school. I was a serious problem even to myself. I almost lost my hold upon the world. But at last I developed a sort of dual stride: and was soon deliciously afield in vast and parabolic realms whence I was never to return to the Victorian tenements. Not . . . that is . . . for a score of years: and hence this story.

Dickens dwelt with me as clear as Scott: but differently. He must have held me close, else it is not probable I should have read all of his novels within a season packed by the normal life of a New York schoolboy. But even as I read him, there was born in me a new sense: condescension. I read and enjoyed Dickens. But I thought I knew the while that he was rather shoddy, not al-

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together serious stuff. He was related in my mind with such exploits as playing hookey to go to Proctor's, or scaring with a ghost story a brace of pigtailed girls, or giving myself up to an orgy of cocoanut candy—my favorite confection. While "Oliver Twist" and "Barnaby Rudge" and Lady Deadlock held me enthralled, I felt superior to them. The tears inspired by Sidney Carton and Esther Summerson did not wipe out a certain sense that I knew better than this: that Dickens was an entertainer, scarcely a gentleman, a wise man not at all, and that his books belonged to the wide category of shallow pleasures not very far removed from the comic weeklies, from the melodramas at the Harlem Opera House, from our own antics and charades at school. My early passion for the Russian and French masters, my meeting a little later with Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, DeFoe confirmed . . . at least to my own satisfaction . . . this early judgment. I am afraid I came to despise Dickens, I was ashamed of my past pleasure in his books. Dickens grew to be a sort of touchstone in my encounters with the world. To admire him was a token of congenital backwardness: to be beyond him was a sign of the dawn. The process was of course for long unconscious, and for still longer was I unaware of the emotional hold that the man had on me in the very force of my rejection. But it is clear that I associated Dickens with the world of my childhood, with the world that must serve me as a springboard as I leaped

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away toward myself. The admiration of Dickens which I found in my immediate elders was a part of this antipathy: but it was a greater thing. His work became a grandiose swollen symbol of every canon, moral, æsthetic, intellectual, which repelled me: of every mode of life which I felt called upon to fight. The very furniture of his houses was to me heavy, dull and dark. The very food of his feasts, with their endless meats and proteins, nauseated me in my new need for greens and fruits. His humor assembled in my mind the things one should not laugh at: his pathos the things at which one must not cry. He was the Enemy during those passionate years when I carried my love of Balzac, of the Russians and the Elizabethans solitary through my little world in which Longfellow reigned as a poet and Whitman was unknown.

Of course, I could not forget Dickens, although the act of rereading him would have been impossible. I recall one empty afternoon, before I went to College, how I picked up "Bleak House" and found the prose so full of wailing lyric fallacies and grimacing pathos that I rushed to Swift as if I had been poisoned. Dickens the Enemy dimmed only as my own world shaped: as I discovered fellows who felt at least in part as I did about life and letters: and as the prestige of my Continental loves (whom as a boy I had somehow pictured quite as solitary and obscure and guilty as myself) made it less imperative to fight him. Dickens dimmed. I knew him still, as I knew the dragon

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chair which had been so vast an experience for me when I was four. But Dickens became as inert as the chair. I could sit in the chair when I visited my parents and find it merely comfortless. I could watch cheerful retrogrades at their Dickens worship, and find them merely dull.

And then, this very year . . . just a short time ago . . . my friend Van Wyck Brooks came back from California. We had our usual long evening of disagreements. And in their affectionate course, he remarked that he had been rereading Dickens. There was an ominous silence which he broke by saying: "He's the real thing" . . . or words to that effect: "I read him with delight, with a sense of fresh discovery and relief. You should go back to him, Waldo!"

Certain severe shocks do not penetrate at once. If we are conscious at all we are prone to say: "Strange, this doesn't move me more." Only later the full force of the displacement tells. So, when Van Wyck Brooks made his announcement, I suppose I smiled and veered a bit in my chair and proceeded with my discussion of Jules Romains. After I was home . . . long after . . . the power of his words made good their devastation of my common way. As you will see for yourself: for I journeyed one day back to New York and I found on a shelf in my father's library (now alas! a modern room without magic and without shadows) that selfsame regiment of books. And I pulled out

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a fat brown volume lettered in gold. And I said to my father: "May I borrow this?"

There was a triumphant twinkle in his eye as he nodded, swept the low shelf with a generous gesture, and said: "Help yourself, my boy." And there was a humorous twinkle in his eye as he asked me . . . I was packing the book in my wallet. . . "Next time you come, will you bring some more of the new French fiction? I've gone through the last batch." . . So after twenty years, I revisited Charles Dickens. I reread "David Copperfield." It is but justice to tell you in what mood.

To call my spirit kind would be to underestimate my benign expectancy. Long since has the need gone of using my boyhood world as a springboard. And long since have gone the tensions, antipathies and judgments that are indeed but the mechanics of our leap into our proper world. I am in my world. I accept it. But I have no illusions about its unique rightness or its elected superiority to all the other worlds that have served (as will mine) as successive springboards to illusory ultimates. Doubtless I am getting old, for as I look back on my Victorian childhood even its horrors and revolts bring through the altering years a sweet remembrance: a pain that it is luxury to dwell in. I feel the pathos, the ironic pathos of proportioning growth: the wistful fallacy that makes the seed sing earth when it must sink its roots, and sing the sun when it is ready to shoot up. Earth and sun are equal, but the pushing

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seed in its career you will not convince. So I look back upon that world of majolica and bric-a-brac, of gas and **RIGHT** and **WRONG** with a gentleness that is almost wooing. The dragon-armchair does not seem so ugly to me now. If I could put it back into that corner of my father's library . . that dark room lined with ponderous books and strutting furniture, and a single window, and in the center my father's desk, a great table with gesticulant legs . . I should love to sit in it, I should note with pleasure the crick it brought my neck: and if it scared me I should be in ecstasy! I could lift welcoming eyes today to that old chandelier, all gyring brass and pendulous crystals. If I can think with peace of antimacassars, should I not welcome Micawber?

Well: to get to the point: I did; I welcomed Peggotty, Betsy Trotwood, the murdering Murdstones, Micawber and his spouse . . welcomed them as old relations to whom, very possibly, I had in my tumultuous youth been a bit nasty and unjust. How complex are our simplicities! At eleven, was I unfair to this writer Dickens because I needed to be rid of his world, only to find myself at thrice that age once more unfair, because in the pathos of my distance I had gotten a bit homesick? Was I to oscillate between kicking Dickens out from under and beckoning him back as an inaccessible mirage of my own past? Was I never to be able to read Dickens straight?

After the first chapter or so, I tried . . and I

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believe succeeded. I gave my mood a proper dressing and solemnly adjured my mind in words like these: "Now look here. This is a problem. Solve it. This is a bit of a mystery . . . not an important: just a bit of a one . . . but you can't clear it with sentiment or pathos. What is this writer worth? on whom so many have placed great store. This man whom Landor likened to Shakespeare: whom but the other day you heard Gide put in a phrase with Dostoyefsky."

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The literary elements with which Dickens built belong to the drama rather than to the novel. They are two, chiefly: the Moral Play (which France gave to England, but to which England made the contribution of the character of Vice), and the Melodrama. The essence of the Moral Play is of course its employment of personified human traits as characters. Its whole tendency in England has been toward the comedic, at least away from the ponderous and tragic. The genre at its best had a svelte and comely form. The characters were kept stripped to essentials. Their being, action and dialogue conformed to a naïve intuitive conception of man's spiritual dilemmas. The Restoration Comedy is a perverse recrudescence of the Morality Play. Congreve, Wycherly, Vanbrugh and Farquhar held to its genre's essential needs and to its aesthetically pure accoutrements. These characters are still in the graphic sense pure traits: they are gracefully and econom-

ically drawn: they are consistent. From the tassel on a Congreve hero's hat to his palpable heart, the man is "in character," he has the solidity of the theoretic atom. Moreover, the good taste which early recognized the hostility of the character Morality and the incident Melodrama and which kept the two forms separate even in the Elizabethan chaos, still prevailed. In Dickens only, do we find these two repellent elements intermingled and overblown to a hypertrophy in which their ancient hardness, their classic traits of essential drawing and control are lost.

The famous characters of Dickens are the descendants of the Vices and Virtues of the Morality. But they are to their predecessors as a vast worm-eaten apple is to a small sound one. The strange worm at their heart is the melodramatic action forced by the strange plot. Underneath the studied hard exterior of Betsy Trotwood her stuff and her ways are one with those of Agnes or of Peggotty. The Micawber part of Micawber is wholly a matter of a few phrases and ricochets of mood (from despair to hilarity to despair). Underneath, he merges with the sentimental mush of Ham and David and Traddles . . of all the "good" men of the book. The Morality Play element in Dickens is a surface. Even the "imbecility" of Mr. Dick is a periphery. He talks like a fool, but he acts like David Copperfield whose "intelligence" is peripheral as well. The *fond*, the stuff of the Dickens novel is of a wholly different

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genre, the Melodrama—an action of chance and incident and adventure.

We have then a hybrid, a rather monstrous hybrid: an altogether false one. If we examine the action of *Copperfield*, we shall see this clearly. Upon the stage of the thriller at Drury Lane, the myriad characters forever meet and clash in an irrelevant immediacy which we accept since it is the entire premise of the show. The stage of Dickens is wider and more vague: but the encounters upon which the action rests are not less fortuitous. Witness the chance that brings Micawber to Canterbury. Witness that storm that flings Steerforth at the feet of Ham whom he has despoiled of "little Em'ly." Witness the insouciant ease with which Mr. Peggotty and David find Martha in the slums of London and with which Martha finds Em'ly when she returns from her wanderings abroad. Or witness the juxtaposition of the two villains of the piece, Heep and Lattimer, in adjacent cells of the very prison run by Mr. Creakle and visited by the two heroes, *Copperfield* and Traddles. Melodrama might be described as a formal escape from Drama . . . as a substitution for it and for our need of it. From the urgency of character, an escape through the primacy of accident: from the fatality of will, an escape through happy chance. *Copperfield* well expresses this typical mechanic of escape. And wherever the hazard of Dickens' story brings him to the edge of drama, the melodramatic brings an immediate

solution. David, for instance, is wed to Dora, but Agnes is evidently his match. Here is the suggestion of a true dramatic conflict. Dickens avoids it by Dora's death. The confrontation of Ham Peggotty and Steerforth, his mortal enemy, offers a dramatic moment. Dickens smears it out in a ridiculous "storm." Finally, David's innocent participation in the "ruining" of Em'ly offers a subjective topic of spiritual anguish. Dickens remains blandly unaware. Such stuff could not "show" on Drury Lane.

Now, these endless coincidences and evasions are absurd, instead of pleasant as in good melodrama, because of the book's serious pretensions. You will find similar artifice in all art, high and low. Dostoyefsky's characters, for instance, have too a miraculous way of meeting every time they go into the street, and of congregating in a single hall-room. But the Russian's characters are spiritually knit: they are limbs and organs of a compact æsthetic body. Their perpetual encounter and proximation in the flesh is as æsthetically right as the interplay of our muscles is anatomically right. The artist has created a spiritual communion so compelling that we accept its mechanical makeshifts. There is no such union within the plot-engines of Dickens. These characters lack even the two-dimensional compactness of the old Morality. They are rather puppets of a single wood on which the writer has foisted individual recognition by the imposition of traits wholly at

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variance with his book's dynamics. These famous characters bear no true relation to their own lives: they can bear none possibly to any other. The æsthetic sense that the book gives (and this is true of all the books of Dickens) is therefore inferior to that of a good melo. The stage is empty: even the accustomed scenery of town and tree is wanting: and a clever but visible hand manipulates upon its waste a congeries of sticks on which are stuck the flags . . . the traits . . . that identify the persons. For Dickens was decidedly not of that low order of artist who create verisimilitude in consequence of an assiduous study of detail. Dickens was no psychologist, and but a scant observer. Had he possessed half the watchful eye with which he is dowered by his worshipers, he would have dressed his characters less thinly: he would have contrived to put a tang of the salt into his Peggotties, a touch of the human into his Murdstones, a twinge of lovableness into his horrendous seducers, a moment of plausibleness into his Heeps and Pecksniffs.

But if Dickens is no observer, he is something more: he is an inventor. Indeed the best that can be said of him is that he is not remotely realistic. This negative quality is his closest claim to the company of artists. There exist no Quixotes, no Vautrins, no Pécuchets. And there exist no Heeps, no Fagins, no Mantalinis, no Esthers, no Quilps, no Wickfields. There exist no storms like the one

at Yarmouth where Steerforth wins the vengeance of the Lord. But, also, there exist no storms like the whirlwind with which the Lord comes upon Job. Character and situation in Dickens is arbitrary and stylized: and to this degree kin not only to the substance of the Moral Play, of the Melodrama and of the books of Chivalry, but to the characters and situations of Homer, Æschylus, of Rabelais, Molière and Balzac, of Cervantes and Dostoyefsky. The books of these artists are great because in their invented and incommunicable forms they have captured a great essence and a great substance. In these æsthetic entities, the deep elements of life, its passion, its beauty, its terror and its love are more intensely present, more powerfully and accessibly formed and more lastingly alive, than in the myriad individuals who carry these same elements their fitful and evanescent hour. Unfortunately, the inventions of Dickens are not deeper but shallower, not intenser but slacker, not more living but decidedly less dimensionally alive, not more luminous but grayer than the common average of the London street. His universe is peopled by a procession of puppets indescribably dull and simple and flat: without their "trait" they fall at once into the limbo of the mind that made them. But the world of the great artist is peopled by souls more perdurant and vaster than any which our senses can encounter in our "phenomenal" life.

It appears, then, that Dickens was amply pos-

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sessed of the mechanics of creation, and that he had nothing to create. His was the type of mind now best exemplified in the literature of the "colyum" that knows indeed if Mrs. Gamp is carrying an umbrella but ignores her soul: that can mimic the roar of a Sikes but has no inkling of the man. Do you recall David at work in the warehouse of Murdstone and Grimsby? his expressed contempt for his two fellows, Mealy Potatoes and Mick Walker? and his resolve to keep clear of all contact with such trash? David reveals the psychologic motives of his creator. Dickens was the perfect bourgeois snob. He sentimentalizes the downtrodden to assure his smugness of the simple souls and humble pleasures of the poor. But he despises them too much to observe them really and to expose them humbly. It was more to the point . . and a thousand times more remunerative . . to invent Peggotties and Marthas: to give the dominant Middle Class a bag of tricks that at once made them smugly weep and comfortably laugh. I recommend to the amateur of contrasts the *novela ejemplar* of Cervantes entitled "Rinconete y Cortadillo." It is the original of the milieu of Oliver Twist. It was written by a man who could have had no ethical twinge in asserting the superiority of the rich over the poor: by a man who praised the Most Catholic Kings for ridding Spain of all her Jews and Moors: by a man whose intellectual convictions were certainly far lower than those of Dickens. But it was also written by an

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artist. With no exhortation, no spill of sentiment and pathos, the artist takes his miserable subject and from its color and passion and tumult of human lives builds a design in which Life bears the synthesis of beauty.

The trouble with Dickens may well be not in his intellectual convictions but in the fact that these were the best part of him. They represent a Class. And the artist is ever the representative of Man. It is a bad artist indeed whom his Class holds wholly. Dickens stood exclusively and fully for his Class . . . in its ethical and social doctrines, in its inheritance of shoddy cultural traditions. I find no mystery, therefore, and no secret in the fact of his immense success. He was a powerful craftsman. He worked with the same sort of intellectual stuffs as Harold Bell Wright: but he surpassed him immeasurably in muscularity and in the sweep of his technical prowess. His prose, on the whole, was precise and clear. And his entire energetic gift was at the service of the comfort of a Class that ruled England, created America, and reapportioned France.

But what a Show he might have given us, had he been less serious and solemn in his Class-cultural purpose! For these myriad characters of Dickens are impertinent only in their pretentious milieu. They deserve a world of their own . . . a modern home sorely in need of such delightful tenants . . . the world in which a less noble and more

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artistic Dickens would have been wise enough to place them.

I mean of course the world of the Music Hall, of the Music Show . . . the true home for the Dickensian genius. In his first books, the characters all but knock at that stage door. Think of Pickwick, of the comics in "The Old Curiosity Shop," think of Mantalini and Dotheboy's Hall and the delicious villains of "Oliver Twist." Do they not dance and sing across the background? The primum mobile of the Music Hall character is a lyricism that will immediately project its essence, and these early fictions of Dickens are lyrical indeed. "Barnaby Rudge" marks the downfall of the potential Dickens. The man becomes serious, his spontaneous power fades. In the later novels, "Copperfield," "Dombey," "Bleak House," "Little Dorrit," etc., etc., the lyrical trait is almost absent, the complex thriller-plot grows obsessive. Of all the world of Copperfield, Micawber alone is fit, as he stands, by his lyrical élan for the Variety Show. But the raw material for a superb performance is there. And I hereby propose to some American Baileff the resuscitation of "David Copperfield" in the true light of the Dickensian genius.

In a serious novel, these characters are shallow and absurd. As a serious movie, the book has already failed. But as a roughhouse musical comedy I submit that it would carry New York. It has material worthy of the genius of Fannie Brice and of her most excellent confrères.

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The plot will be reduced to the shadowy semi-ironic foil of all musical comedy plots. It should not be more obtrusive than that of "Shuffle Along." In this frame, our comedians will lift up Dickens to his apotheosis at last: the lyrical and grotesque that was his true potential. Heep and Wickfield will do a song-and-dance in which the hypocrite will writhe splendidly against the heavy half-soused solicitor who will hold in one hand a bottle of Port and in the other a portrait of his wife. The Peggotties and Mrs. Gummidge will dance a horn-pipe in their darling house-boat. Micawber will monolog, and his family will chant a polysyllabic chorus. I burn to see the "murdering Murdstones" in a clumsy jig . . . he with his slithering eyes, she with her steel chains. What a superb horror dance (something like the graveyard jig one saw in "Liza"), could be executed by Miss Dartle with her SCAR and the proud Mrs. Steerforth. Tradles will be an acrobatic clown tripping over Aunt Betsy and vigorously caned by Mr. Creakle. I'm afraid the "angel face" Agnes is too good to be merely toned down. So we'll fannybrice her and marry her in the end to Pop Micawber. There must be in every musical show a sentimental song, a boring tenor voice. For these traditional purposes, David himself may be transposed verbatim. Dora needs little change for the pony-flapper act. Nor can the recognition scene in jail where David discovers Lattimer and Heep be bettered for conventional dénouement. But we'll amplify the final

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curtain. The reader will recall that all such “good” characters as Dickens cannot well enrich in England because of their inferior social standing he packs off to riches in Australia. We’ll simply have the Micawbers and the Peggotties back in their Colonial splendor. Micawber who has become a Judge will make a speech in the vein of the American Senate: and the lowly fisherfolk who danced a hornpipe in Act One will be dressed as cannibals from the Bush, thus exemplifying the noble influence of emigration upon the British soul.

It is an error to believe that the one original taste in art is for the Great. There is a taste equally primal for the small. Great art is arduous and makes arduous demands. The athletic in us loves it. Great art is explosive and creative. It transforms us. It forces us to digest a universe vastly beyond the demesne of our senses. Small art has gentler graces. We may love it because it makes no demands on our spirit or our mind: because it flatters our complacence, cajoles our indolence, meets our childish need of a cry and a laugh not too hard won. We may love an art that is the very contrary of a catharsis: an auto-erotic art terminant in no release, no cleansing, but perpetually soothing: an art that tucks us the more tightly in our couch of prejudice and passes a not too tumultuous hand over our sensual flesh.

Such an art is that of Dickens. It is almost the most gigantic small art in the domain of letters: and in this contrast between its quality and its size it is a pretty symbol for its Class. . .

20: *Shakespeare and Empire*

WIDESPREAD among the civilized, and almost universal among the English-speaking, is the assumption that William Shakespeare is the greatest literary genius of the Western world. This assumption is so seldom examined that it is in reality a myth—the Myth of Shakespeare. Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge, Taine, Suarès are archetypes of the imaginative critics whose evocative energy and need of worship have moved them to nurture it. Voltaire, Tolstoi, Shaw are examples of the controversial men who by the miscarriage of their disapproval have nurtured the myth no less. A part of Shakespeare's genius lies in his choice of foes. If I am right and he is the most charming, rather than the profoundest of writers, we see how his charm works both ways. For he charms his lovers to furious hyperbole (and naught convinces like the madness that says Yea) and he charms his critics to misfire (and a challenge ill-couched, a blow ill-aimed, is a defeat foredoomed).

Yet surely among the literate there must be those who stand by me in my conviction that Shakespeare's powers, howeverfeat and great, are not so preëminent as his myth would have them. . .

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Æschylus: the tragic depths of life made crystal, made massive with facets of golden song. Plato: a true theater of the mind. Dante: a universal form where life, scaled by a vast mind's voyages, is essenced to a subjective passion as unitary as his stuff is infinite. Rabelais: a book which gives sheer, whole, the soil-base of mankind and man's proud sublimation into thought and laughter, a book honest and intact as a child's body, fresh as a young forest, sounding as the sea. And beside this book whose prose crowds with scarce a drooping line in the densest of warm rhythms, another book glowing with a mellow love as far beyond the Rabelaisian prose as fire is beyond the mellowest carved wood: this book the matrix of a character more significant than any other literary creation since the figure of Christ: the book of Cervantes, a book as simple and as intricate as the peaked plains of Spain. Intellection, distilled of its reducing elements and held to an æsthetic form that is its essence, the true pure prototype of modern art, the Ethic of Spinoza: a Temple whose stones are manifold mind. Montaigne: whose name is a people's will to challenge the pride of mystery with their own pride of knowledge: Pascal: whose lucid and impregnable prose is the response to the people—these two the dialogue of France. The moulded confessional of Villon; the fire-parabolas of Blake; the “wild-earth” urns of Keats; the dawns of Shelley; the macrocosm of Walt Whitman. . . Or the great organic visions: the human will un-

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bridled and extended as in Boccaccio and Chaucer, the human will compressed into a social or an individual soul, Balzac and Dostoyefsky. . . The Shakespearean is aburst with his answer.

“Of course,” laughs he, “how clever! To topple the master from his Imperial throne, you assemble the kings of the literary world. What better way could you prove Shakespeare’s vastness than by this need of leaguing the perfections of all the literatures against him?”

Before we answer this answer, let us examine it. It has a tinge which for want of an apter term I might call imperialistic. “Shakespeare,” it suggests, “covers the literary world. To match him, or to find him, you must go afield in the five kingdoms of letters. Each has its kings. Shakespeare the emperor of them all.”

What is the true preëminence of Shakespeare?

Elizabethan Drama, as I understand it, perfected four large forms. In two of these, the town or genre play and the masque, Jonson, Dekker, Middleton and Ford take easy precedence over Shakespeare. In the other two, the romantic comedy and the poetic melodrama, Shakespeare is supreme, although certain pieces by Marlowe, Tourneur and Webster attain a pitch of intensity and shock that even Lear scarce passes. But it is true: the qualities of *As You Like It*, *The Merry Wives*, *Much Ado*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, are unique. Here is charm perfumed, and grace. Here is a moving

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spectacle of wit, laden with hearty hungers, charged with loves; a tracing of curves and feints upon the flat of Time unequalled for freshness and for fairness. Here are dreamed women, the very breasts of adolescent worship. Here are brave men, the very boast of lusty boastful boys. This motley of clowns, courtiers, villains, lovers lays a fragrant field beneath our stumbling and sore feet. And the heavier battalions: Othello, Macbeth, Timon, Brutus, Lear—what singing charm in their compact of fury! Could lyric boys aping the elements want more? High scenes: the very extravagance of prospect. Resonant lines bristling with hard long words as Roman marches bristle with swords and spears: how the groundling must have loved them! Are they not the apotheosis of youth, making noble gesture, making noble speech? Are they not the pageant of Adolescence?

Surely the tragedies of Shakespeare are the most fetching of melodramas. This array of Richards, Harries, Antonies and Iagos looms in the mind of youth as do the adventures of wonderland in the heart of Alice. But shall we compare them with Prometheus, Oedipus, Medea? Shall we compare them with the tragic masks of Cervantes and Dostoyefsky? Do not these kings rule over a child's world?

Shakespeare takes his tale and runs his figures through it. He takes his characters and pins on them his intricate wordings. If the axis of the Wheel of Life revolves at the heart of the dramas

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of Othello, Macbeth, Lear, I have missed it. The æsthetic consequences of these high-pitched contemplations thrust within the chaos of their form is to shrink the plays, to give them as organic wholes a fading and frail life. The parts in Shakespeare are ever greater than the wholes. His plays are parcels of splintered splendor, because he lacked the austere power to hold the slow moulding of his vision against his world's encroachment. Glimpses we have of the Wheel: the speeches flash upon revelation and fall back. But the plays roll rather ridiculously off, beneath the high burden of their words. They are like floats on dumpy wooden wheels, bearing aloft an unrelated splendor.

To shift my figure: I find in the plays of Shakespeare his greater intuitions playing like fireworks above the scant frames of his action. Macbeth must stand apart to utter loveliness, Portia must stand apart to be wise. Lear must rave in a storm to be more than a booby. The plays are pot-pourris, brilliant machines of horror and of movement: the very masterworks of melodrama. Take them all in all, I find them as organisms shallow, as mechanisms for profound emotion sprawling, as vehicles of vision lifeless: albeit a genial poet has lavished in them his lovely bloom of pleasaunce, vision and surprise.

Bring up the others. . . For me the spheric realm of Dante reduces Shakespeare to a province. The lusty blast of Rabelais and the meadow-breath of Chaucer shrink the Shakespearean *afflatus* to

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the vapors of a stuffy stage. To me they live in a shut room of Dostoyefsky deeps and parabolæ of soul beyond the reaches of Shakespearean halls. Prometheus, Ulysses, Quixote, the Villon and the Whitman of themselves outstature every character in Shakespeare: and there is in Dante and Balzac an organic mass by contrast with which the Elizabethan's plays dwindle to the work of a man who took the stuffs of his age, the needs and manners of his craft and, little moved to cast them all aside in a Dionysian gesture, did well with them, did supremely well—did better than his fellows. . .

Perhaps it is the essential limitation of Mr. T. S. Eliot that he should have seen so clear the organic chaos of the material of Shakespeare's Hamlet and yet so wholly missed that this very chaos offered the poet a substance harmonious with his spirit and hence æsthetically ripe to be fused into the unity of a play. The cross-stresses of material in the earlier Hamlets gave to the half-conscious Shakespeare his chance to create a masterpiece. Hamlet is a frail bewildered figure and the play's background bears him out. Hamlet thinks in doubts and poignant vapors and the pulse of villainies and hazards but half real. And such too is the rhythm of his world. The conduct of his uncle is held to the consistency of a frail tissue. The mock crime of the actors is almost equally dense with the actual crime that, significantly, is related by a ghost. Ophelia is the fragrant cobweb even a slight man's will can brush through: and at the end she melts in

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the waters of a brook. Polonius is a gentle fool. Laertes, Fortinbras, Horatio are hesitant half-looming men. Hamlet moves through a physical diaphony of life like his own self-defeating inner shifts. He suffers in a milieu that is the picture of his soul. For once, then, the riddled stuff of the play is the stuff of the poet's intuitions. Drama, word, and dramatist are one.

Hamlet is Shakespeare true to his own inner turmoil. Master W. S. of London was a more commanding fellow. He was an exquisite spirit thrust in a coarse world, who yet had just the canniness to overcome it. His way was to "play the game." He borrows the fury and fustian of the age—all the worn armor of Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy"—and he struts through London. His strutting is Macbeth, Lear, Falstaff: a most successful posture. So at the end, he can retire to his ease in Stratford. But the soul of Shakespeare languishes as the body fattens. (Why was Hamlet stout and short of breath?) The soul of Shakespeare is repugned by fustian, horrified by ghosts, dismayed at the clash of "Elizabethan" action. The career of the man is his other plays. The soul of the man is Hamlet.

Let us see this successful play in the clarity of its own life. Is not the antique "mystery" of Hamlet but the fog of the clash of his most expressive play with the Imperial Shakespearean Myth? Of course, if a Titan wrote Hamlet there's a mystery. But it seems to me that Hamlet is far more

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clearly present than the Titan. Hamlet is exquisite and feminine. Hamlet elects defeat rather than ride the world. His murder is the first of the modern suicides. The downfall of his house is the alternative choice of a passive man to the urgencies of action. Hamlet is proud. But in his temper and his acts, do there not live the signs of the ultimate weak, world-weary, sentimental hero? Who are the successors of Prometheus, Ulysses, Job, Jesus, Don Quixote? The hero is ultimate as the sun. He does not dim to a dynasty. But the successors of Hamlet are Werther, Adolphe, Childe Harold, Max Beerbohm and the mooncalves.

The Tempest is the paradise of Hamlet: the Sonnets are his breviary. Retreating from the challenge of the Elizabethan world (as England has retreated) the poet finds the island of Miranda. There, upheld by the wand of Prospero and happy in his bitterness at last, he stands revealed: prince of the yearning and the wistful, forefather of our romantics who make their cover from the high angry noon of life to the crepuscular peace of death. Good! But where is your hero? where is your mountainous master? Shall the maker of Hamlet be adored with the makers of gods?

In their weakness, equally as in their strength, this fortunate man's plays have worked to win the worship of the modern crowd. He is romantic and he is sentimental. His sonnets show in mere nakedness the supine tenderness by which his hunger wretched its way into the "heart of the world."

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But the feminine qualities of Shakespeare could not alone have won his place. The secret is, that these are subtly concealed and vehicled in a play of strength that is our modern image.

Think of Lear: how at the first onset of emotion it spills into pageant and excess, and these the conveyancers not of strength but of sweet wistfulness—the pity of Cordelia, of Edgar, of old Lear. Compare the Promethean fragment of Æschylus: the fettered Titan, the driven Io who, still upon a naked stage, with her words wanders the world, and the murmurous flowing Chorus of the Oceanides like a human tremorous flesh about these two great contrapuntal Voices. And now, hearken to your neighbor as he extols our age for its engines, for its guns, for its radios and fortunes. Here is strength he can measure. The strength of Shakespeare he can measure also. For it too is quantitative color, it too is a pageant of surfaces and peaks. It too is the creativeness of a soul too slight to hold unto itself its world. Shakespeare's wistful love insinuates our love: his clash of noise cheats our respect for power. And his diapason of inner yearning, inner "spentfulness" with outer show is the equation of the modern world.

Moreover, Shakespeare is the compromise candidate of the Republic of Letters. I am enthralled by the spiritual architecture of Spinoza: Homer makes me nod. But my friend loves Homer, and the *Ethica* does not win him. We can meet in Shakespeare. The critic who praises Plato,

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Augustine, Philo, Montaigne, Racine, will find response: but also he will find coldness. These masters, and the others, are too crystallly, sheerly one to be commonly adored by the variant world. Their completion of form demands the completion of response that only the completely inclined can ever give them. But when the critic praises Shakespeare, his responses are wider because the condition for response is vaguer and less imperiously exacting. The praise of Shakespeare is therefore self-propagating, and in the long run has outstripped all others.

Shakespeare worked in a music of minor flutes bastioned by brass that is our modern music: the music of our world of imperial machines and of dwarfed souls. Shakespeare worked in an accessible art form. The fallacy of treating extension and accessibility as æsthetic measures is to be found in Goethe, in Coleridge, in Arnold, in Taine—in all the major priests of the Shakespearean Myth.

Twice or thrice in history has drama proved an art form deserving of the name of art. Drama in Athens for a while was great. It could achieve greatness because it was sheltered from the mob. The Attic mass nourished it with its sources and its presence, but was psychologically subdued from debauching it, by the authority of the religious spectacle and by the protecting common knowledge of the religious tale. The Greek could construct a profound design upon the Œdipean myth be-

cause the myth was common and because the crowd was ready for ceremonial reasons to accept it. The crowd's attention went to the myth: the artist's attention, freed, went to the soul of man. Such good cultivated soil reappeared under the mediæval church. But the popular chaos could not throw up a Sophocles from its myths, possibly because the myths were alien. Again, the crowd was tempered rightly—though far differently—in the France of the great Louis. This was a rare moment of spiritual and social equilibrium, poised between the turmoils of the religious and of the economic wars: and two great men of the theater rose to take advantage of it. The audience of Paris was genteel and urbane. A deep peace prepared it for the contemplation of subtle differentiations; an intelligent Court, a temperamental King, checked and attuned it: yet it was close enough still to the soil of Rabelais and Villon to welcome the passionate precisions of Molière and the precise passions of Racine.

Shakespeare had no such crowd, no such monarch, no such land. He worked in a muddied art form. But in its low terms he achieved so highly that ever since he has served as meeting ground for intellectual and crowd: he has provided that “golden mean” for which our modern intellectual (nostalgic for support) and our crowding average (nostalgic for good taste) perpetually yearn.

The Myth of Shakespeare is a sign in the popular uprising which moves like a tide from the

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failure of Europe to accept Aquinas to the present preparation of Europe to accept Karl Marx. It is a symbol of the age whose curve-plot is the sentimentalizing and extolling of the qualities of the mass: and the ultimate deification and empowering of the mass itself. But now that the mass approaches its own tragic coronation to which the intellectuals through the ages have prepared it, we might reread our Shakespeare and then go on to the creating of more pregnant myths.

21: *A Letter to the Annual Whitman Celebration*

AM very sorry that I cannot be with you in person at the annual Walt Whitman Celebration. There is no such thing as the spirit without the body, as the thought without the form. If the thought and spirit of Walt Whitman are at all to prevail and function in our American life, they must take shape, they must become part of the body of American experience. These annual gatherings in honor of our Poet are at least the rudiment of such a substantiating act.

It is heartening for us to know that from the American soil there could spring a soul as great as Whitman . . perhaps the deepest and the most creative spirit of the entire Nineteenth Century. But pleasant as this event is to all of us Americans, corroborative as it is of the potential power of our land, it should not lead to complacence and it cannot lead to any genuine satisfaction. For the truth is, that Whitman is as much a solitary in the America of 1923 as he was in the America of 1860! His great work has been in no essential way assimilated into American thought, into American literature, into the American intellectual life. The

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spirit of Walt Whitman has achieved more body in the modern expression of Germany and France than in that of his own country. And if we are proud that Whitman was born in America, it might be well for us to feel a little shame that in all these years America has not come closer to Walt Whitman. Let us remember that the greatness of the Hebrews was due not to the fact that they produced an Isaiah, but rather that they *assimilated* Isaiah, that they made the conscience and grandeur of their Prophets into the very bone and marrow of their life. We shall then see in our possession of Walt Whitman a responsibility rather than a flattering boast: a responsibility that is very grim and very hard, indeed.

Whitman might well remain a divine accident in American history. Let us not be too certain of the contrary, in order that the contrary may more surely come to pass. He might reach his heritage of fulfilment in the intellectual life of other lands (the school-children of Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, etc., know him already better than our university students): while America continues in her present easy course of cleverness and of material success. For in truth, Whitman is more of a solitary in the America of 1923 than he was in the America of 1860. In 1860, Emerson and Thoreau . . . the whole superb tradition of Anglo-Saxon Christianity was still in force. It was bound to die, for despite its nobility, it was too local and too special to be translated into the vaster terms

Salvos

of our American racial chaos. Whitman alone was vast enough, athletic enough in intellect and vision, to measure the parabolic growth of America into its present promise of universality. And so he alone remains, he alone progresses: a marvelous creation of American potentiality, and an ironic reminder of the smallness of present America's spiritual achievement.

I look on Whitman today not so much as a cultural possession of America . . . we have not yet won him . . . but rather as a Challenge. He is a challenge to our literature, to our criticism, to our institutions, to our entire social polity, to grow up to his own universal Norm. The prophets were such a challenge to the Hebrews . . . and they accepted it. Let us do likewise.

Therefore I say that a mere passive love of Whitman is not enough. We must work very hard and very deep upon the message of Whitman and upon its application to ourselves, if he is indeed to become our cultural possession. And here, such a group as this, foregathered to do Whitman homage, might possibly enlarge its function. Such a group as this might crystallize into something more dynamic. I should like, for instance, to see some sort of a Whitman Foundation, amply funded, which would offer a substantial prize and publication to the most significant commentary upon Whitman's work or upon some phase of his work, written annually by an American. It is by such work that the Poet will become organically part of ourselves,

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and that the essence of his creation will become nourishment for the future race of Poets that Whitman envisioned in our land. . . It is not exactly pleasant, but it may be well, for us Americans to realize, that up to the present the most important interpretational work on our great National Poet has been done by a Frenchman named Bazalgette: and that the literary schools which have incorporated most profoundly his message and his æsthetic flourish in Paris and in Berlin.

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